The Impact of Net Culture on Mainstream Societies : a Global Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In this work the impact of the Internet culture on standard mainstream societies has been analyzed. After analytically establishing the fact that the Net can be viewed as a pan-societal superstructure which supports its own distinct culture, an ethnographic analysis is proveded to find out the key aspects of this culture. The elements of this culture which have an empowering impacts on the standard mainstream societies, as well as the elements in it which can cause discouraging social effects are then discussed by a global investigation of the present status of various fundamental aspects (e,g, education, economics, politics, entertainment etc) of the mainstream societies as well as their links with the Net culture. Though immensely potential for providing various prominent positive impacts, the key findings of this work indicate that misuse of Internet can create tremendous harm to the members of the mainstream societies by generating a set of morally crippled people as well as a future generation completely void of principles and ethics. This structured diagnostic approach to the social problems caused by the manhandling of Internet leads to a concrete effort of providing the measures that can be taken to enhance or to overcome the supporting and limiting effects of the Net culture respectively with the intent to benefit our society and to protect the teratoidation of certain ethical values.

Key words: Sociology – Internet – Computer

1   INTRODUCTION

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Evolving out of the United States $ARPANET$[1], first demonstrated in 1972, the Internet did not begin to approach it's current global size until the mid 1980s. With an estimated user-base of nearly 30 million people in countries as diverse as Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, India, Japan, Mexico and many other countries, these networks are not solely a reflection of any one culture, neither do they represent any isolated and singular society in ethnographic form. Rather the users of these networks represent an assortment of diverse cultures as well as a nonstandard homogeneous mixture of very many societies (societies which explicitly exhibit random heterogeneity in many aspects) from across the globe. The principal objective of this project is to determine if a new culture has emerged on these networks, distinct from that of the networks' constituent countries. If such a culture has emerged, the objective is to

- **Provide an ethnographic analysis of this culture**

and

- **Determine what effects (either supporting or limiting) this culture has on the societies from which** *newbies*[9] **are being lured into the hypnotic black hole of the Internet.**

Though primarily intended to focus on mainstream Indian society, the overall analysis of this work is being pursued in a global context keeping in mind the technological ease

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⋆ The *superscripts* on some words/set of words here give the reference number in the the **glossary of selected technical terms** provided at the end of this article (section 10).

of communication via Internet between two randomly chosen points on Cyberatlas, i,e, the concept of formation of an egalitarian global village is being streaked. Basically this work will try to provide the answers of the following questions in a self integrated manner

- **Do the users of the Net form a society with its own distinct culture?**

If so ......,

- **what are the key aspects of this culture?**
- **what elements of this culture (if any) have an empowering and what elements of this culture (if any) have a discouraging effect on the standard mainstream society carried via the *Internauts*[7]?**
- **what measures can be taken to enhance or overcome the empowering and discouraging elements of the culture with the intent of easing the process of enculturation for Internauts to benefit and to prevent the declination of the ethical values of a mainstream society?**

The process of addressing these questions as well as finding their answers will be carried out through the proper analysis of present status of various fundamental aspects of mainstream society (i,e, education, business, entertainment, politics etc.) and their link with the Net.

2   ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE NET CULTURE

To examine whether the Net forms a distinct society supporting its own culture, it is necessary to define the terms **Society** and **Culture** in this context. A review of the Anthropological literature provides the following most suitable definitions

- **Society:** *An abstraction of the ways in which interaction among humans is patterned.*(*Howard(1989)*)

In layman's language the definition could be...

- *A more or less organized group of people of both sexes that share a common culture.*(*Barnouw(1987)*)
- **Culture:** *A culture is the way of life of a group of people, the complex of shared concepts and patterns of learned behavior that are handed down from one generation to the next through the means of language and intuition.*(*Bernard(1988)*)

There are other different ways to narrate what society and culture are. Without giving details about other definitions, it can be said that, though not all in the same fashion, all definitions by and large make a clear distinction between the concepts of society and culture. What then are the dependencies between society and culture? Can a society have more than one culture or can the same culture be shared by It seems quite reasonable to assume that all the members (*having equal financial background*) of a particular society by and large share almost the same culture. It is also implied in the definitions of culture presented by *Ember and Ember(1990)* and *Nanda(1991)* that two different societies cannot posses exactly same culture. One might concede that there is a small possibility that two unrelated societies may, perhaps as a result of similar environment, independently evolve identical culture, but in practice it can be argued that usually this does not happen.

The above discussion is significant in this context because together they imply that if the users of the Net are to be described as having a distinct culture then they need to form one particular separate society. It would appear from the global span of the Net that this is not the case. This dilemma can be resolved by viewing the Net as a *pan-societal superstructure* (*North(1994)*) which is freed of the responsibilities of providing a number of properties that can reasonably be expected from any mainstream society (e,g, reproduction, food and shelter) by virtue of the fact that its members are also the members of traditional mainstream societies that *do supply* all these features. Rather it is a melting pot of different components (such as socialization, economics, politics, entertainment) of many of the standard mainstream societies. Thus the Net *should be viewed not as an independent society* (for it does not provide all of the features of an independent society) , but as a superstructural society which, in a statistical view, can be described as the *superset of intersection where the overlapping subsets are the distinct mainstream societies.*

Regarding the Net's culture we may say this; though it does share many elements with the cultures of the mainstream societies that it spans, much of it is taken from these mainstream cultures, there is also much in it that represents culture adaptization to a new environment. Now if the question arises whether the Net might be considered to be a subculture of some other culture of any other particular mainstream society, it is reasonable to ask *What could the Net be a subculture of?* Given its global spanning size, it is obvious that there is no *one* society or culture that can subsume the Net. It therefore seems ineffectual to think of it in subcultural terms. So while inheriting many cultural elements from the societies that it spans, *this superstructural Net society nonetheless supports its own distinct culture.*

3   ANALYSIS OF THE NET CULTURE

A survey of different literature and a thorough netsurfing gives the following key aspects of the Net culture.....

- Written adaptations to the text-only medium for user to user communication include the use of *emoticons*[5] to denote emotional intent and the use of characters such as "*" and "-" to denote emphasis.

Conclusion: Language of communication gets a new shape?

- In a mainstream society many factors determine how we judge and are judged by other people. Such factors include appearance, gender, race, wealth, dress and occupation. On the mainly text-only channels of intracommunications via Net, these factors are difficult to determine and one is left with far fewer criteria on which Nauts are being judged. Prestige is acquired within the Net culture primarly through what one writes or through philanthropic actions such as maintaining a mailing list or writing freely distributed softwares etc.

Conclusion: A new concept of acquiring social prestige, apparently more healthy than conventional one, is launched.

• On the contrary to the previous feature, for those individuals who are relying on being judged or to judge by such factors as their appearance, wealth, sex appeal etc, the mainly text only communication base of the Net may be an uncomfortable experience.

Conclusion: Counter-culturists on Net? [†]

• The increasing size of the Net leads to an increased opportunity for the exchange of various resources. Resources such as advice, graphics and softwares are most often handed on the Net through a reciprocal exchange system. With the increasing size of the Net yielding a higher population of users available to supply resources, it follows that there is a greater pool of resources from which to draw information. This is a curiously inverted position to that of a mainstream society. In such a society, when resources is shared amongst a number of people, the greater the population the more thinly the resource is distributed. On the Net, however, if a resource is made available for FTP^6 then it can be copied by any number of people without lessening the share of the resource available to each.

Conclusion: Reciprocity is an important feature of the Net's economy. Signature of symbiotic culturization?

• Social stratification is present within the Net society; for example, system administrators and news group moderators have powers that most users do not. The most vital point in this regard (which will be discussed in detail later on) is, due to financial, educational and technical constraints, not all users have equal access to the resources.

Conclusion: Net capitalism?

• The Net is viewed by some of its misusers as an anarchy which can cause (and in reality, *it does* cause) severe moral degradation of the members (mainly, of the teen-agers) of the mainstream societies in a direct or indirect way. (Detail discussion will be presented in the next section)

Conclusion: Degredation of ethical values through Net.

• However, the Net culture has a complex set of conventions and lore called *Netiquette* to which users are expected to conform. Transgressions of which are supposed to be dealt by other users in various ways ranging from written chastisement to the invocation of police authorities of mainstream societies.

Conclusion: Protection of teratoidation of Net societies?

After these general discussions about the nature of the Net

[†] Though the introduction of various highly powerful and user-friendly graphics packages changes the text only nature of communication day by day, still there are scopes for them who don't want to get exposed about their features. Different Net-friendship, Net-dating sites are the proper examples for this purpose.

society and its culture, it is now quite reasonable to fragmentize the analysis into diverse social issues (like education, business, politics etc) case by case and to study the correlation between the mainstream societies and the Net in these contexts.

4 CORRELATION BETWEEN THE MAINSTREAM SOCIETIES AND THE NET

4.1 Education

As already been discussed, Nauts have a facility to hide their racial, financial and even generic identity if they want. This makes the Net as a medium of distant education and learning. Net has immense power to change the whole infrastructure of educational system in a highly positive way. According to Neil Rudenstein, a famous academician from Harvard University, USA, education is basically a dynamic and continuous process which can give it's best output if the student-teacher interaction can be maximized. The chemistry of this interaction is the backbone of a proper education system. In our mainstream societies, orthodox educational infrastructure is insufficient to provide the maximization of this interaction. All students do not get equal time to interact with the teacher nor they are being paid equal attention. There also remain some psychological barriers which prevent the mobilization of the dynamism of the teacher student interaction process, for example, the shyness of a student to ask questions in the class or the inferiority complex generated by social or financial backwardness. These problems can be overcome if the Net can properly used as an educational media because academic interactions via the Net will make the teacher-student interaction more effective and vibrant. According to Nancy Singer, a Prof. of Colorado University, Department of education, application of the Net as an educational media helps students to overcome shyness and to enhance their power of communication one example of which is the publication of the world's first *fully* net-operated newspaper maintained by the teen-ager students of the Centeniel school. Moreover, the Net's voluminous information bank, along with the application of different graphics packages and audio clips makes the education more interesting and effective.

Here one crucial point comes. What does education means really? When should a person be called educated? Does the process of education mean only accumulation of information and data and to a make career? The answer is a strong NO! Real education helps to grow certain sense of principle and ethics. Without them education is incomplete. It can provide a person a very good career and wealth but can never make him/her a proper human being. And as all these value-related issues of the education have concrete dependence on the ethical views of the teacher concerned, Net can *never* give complete education independently. Regarding communication and information gathering, Net has absolutely no parallel, but its control *has to be* taken over by human being when question of generation of values arises.

4.2   Spreading of harmful materials

As already mentioned, some of the misusers of the Net is viewing it as an anarchy. The entry of any arbitrary user in Net world has created many crucial social problems all of which are carried to all the mainstream societies via the Net superstructure. The most fatal problem is the *cyberporno* - the open business of pornography in the whole realm of the Net. As there is no bar in entry into the Net, companies like Brandy, Web and Penthouse have launched their nasty business of pornography throughout the Net. A recent report from a research group of Carnegi Mealon University, USA, shows that 83.5 percent of the stored pictures in Usenet are pornographic in nature. Three years back, in 1995, US Government launched the *Communication Decency Act* (*CDA*) but it is a pity that nobody could be arrested under this act because almost all the companies of USA made appeal in the Supreme Court against this act claiming that it violates their democratic freedom of speech. In 1996, the German Government has declared some of the sites as illegal and entry into those sites are kept prohibited thereof. Recently the Singapore Government also had to take the same step. Smith System Engineering, a UK based consultancy, has been awarded a contract from the European parliament to investigate the fearability of jamming pornography and racism (another fatal problem created by the racial group of people such as Neo-Nazis) on the Net. The project, expected to to run for six months, will examine methods where by offensive materials are distributed and study the technical method of blocking their flow. Unfortunately all these processes could not make the situation that much better. Millions of the *Net-porno* web sites are there entry into which requires only an *Adult check ID password* which can easily be accessed by paying only 15 - 20 US $ and as payment is done by credit cards via Net, there is absolutely no way to check whether the applicants for this card are really over 18 by age or not! So millions of teen agers are accessing these dirty sites regularly which can result (and practically, which *does* result) a severe degradation of ethical and moral values worldwide. In western capitalist countries, such as in the USA and some countries from central and western Europe, numerous teenage crimes have been reported to police which, according to the modern sociologists, are believed to be committed from odd sexual obsessions generated by different pornographic sites of the Net. Not only in western countries, Asia's rapid growing economies are using the Net to integrate themselves with the world economy but the governments of some of the regions are not entirely comfortable with the phenomenon. The rise in the popularity of the global networks has alarmed some governments which fear unbridled access could lead to distribution of pornography, spread religious unorthodoxy or encourage political dissidence. None of them has come up with any foolproof plan to screen undesirable materials on Net, and experts say such control is technically very difficult.

So it comes out that ultimately not the technology, but our ethical sense matters to make the society free from evils of misuse of Net. The combined education, taste, culture, principle and ethics of the Nauts are the recipes which can make the Net culture clean, and *here humanity takes over technology.*

4.3   Business and Industry

Regarding business, the Net has brought massive changes in the way of business in financially forward countries. Small companies have got a golden opportunity to spread their business in international market through the commercial home pages and web sites. Introduction of Net helped the Software companies to make maximum profit. Netscape Communication, an USA based software making company first launched the Netscape Navigation Browser which made Netsurfing very easy. After that, Microsoft and Oracle made different softwares which nowadays have immense application in Netsurfing. Besides this, Digital Equipment and Sysco Systems are involved in data transfer technology via Net. The most important contribution came from SUN Microsystems which introduced JAVA, a very powerful language for different kind of Computer applications in the Net. On the other hand, the wide spanning of the Networks has created problems for some computer companies also. As for the example, the future market of the softwares *Workgroup* and *Networking* developed by Novel and Lotus (two branches of world famous IBM group) became uncertain. Another important contribution of Net is the introduction of a couple of very powerful *Online Information Services* e,g, NETCOM, UUS, PIPEX, DAEMON etc. Their wide application has lessened the business of electronic world (e-world) package of some pre Net online services, such as of Microsoft and Apple.

Probably the most stirring social effect of the introduction of these online information services awaiting in the near future is the sharp blow on paper and printing industries. Heavily graphics and audio clip supported www is fostering the commercial use of the Net by making it easy and fun for Nauts to check out informations and products whenever they wish with as much depth of multimedia detail as they want. Newspapers, books, magazines and journals can directly be accessed from the Net more easily and quickly than in printed form. This may cause a decreasing want of printed materials in near future resulting the deterioration of the condition of the paper and printing industries. Who will provide a parallel job for the workers in these industries has become a major question. Not only in paper and printing industries, the online shopping system also may create such kind of problems. Worlds largest retailer Wall Mart, UK's famous Berkley Group and other different companies have launched their shopping malls in Net which results in the unemployment of regular workers in various shopping complexes.

5   INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Focusing the analysis on the Indian mainstream society, it is quite reasonable to say that situations differ in India compared to the western countries, the reason for this will be clear from the discussion hereafter.

The rate of literacy in India is around 52 %, among them, the number of persons with a strong background in English is countably small. So a very small fraction of 950 million Indians have academic qualification to deal with the Net. Besides this, one needs around 50 Thousand Rs/_ for bying a computer along with the standard VSNL charge for get-

ting an Internet connection. Only a small part of the literate Indian population can afford this amount. So the percentage of the total Indian as private Net users is very small. In our country, Net facilities are accessed basically by people involved in academic world, e,g, in Universities and research institutions. But the rate at which the market price of computer and electronic components are decreasing may sharply change the situation in near future. However, the Net consciousness is continuously increasing. Here the view differs among the common people. Here, though a part of the Net users are thinking to use the Net to enhance the academic standard in our country, the major part of the Net using community are welcoming Net looking for their own business interests. The *Internet Service Providers* (*ISP*) are seeing the Indian market very much promising as well as virgin after the *Open Market Policy* launched by Indian Government. Here one crucial point must be emphasized, in a poor but promising country like India, all the policies regarding the use and spread of Internet should be made very carefully because dealing with the interest of common people is an extremely sensitive and delicate issue in our country. India has its own completely different form of societal infrastructure compared to the western countries and even than the other developed Asian countries also. The form of the social, political and economic problems of the Indian mainstream society is an absolutely disjoint set. Here in our country the fundamental accesses and facilities to the essential need are very thin. Under these circumstances, determining the policy which will fix up the usage of the Net needs very special attention as well as deep thought because the prime aim of spreading the Net in a third world country should necessarily be focussed on the issue of the development and prosperity of common mass; like all other facilities, it also should not be unevenly heaped onto a small class of capitalist elements. The policy-makers should not be biased to lump all the facilities of the Net only among the upper class keeping in mind the fact that mass communication is a vital factor for the overall development of an underdeveloped third world country and the Net has immense potential for this purpose. The spreading of the application of Net amongst the have nots of Indian society should definitely bring a prosperous future if the supreme control is in proper hands anyway.

A spark of effort in this regard, though very tiny, (still which shows a very bright prospect) is being observed recently in Andhrapradesh. Ranadeep Sudan, an additional secretary of Chandrababu ministry has made a rough sketch about how to use the Net as the mass communicator between the various public sectors and the common people. This is being considered by the experts as a very important step on the Government policy of Information technology. In this concept paper of using the Net properly, it has been explained thoroughly how, by 2001 AD, electronic network will start operating fully to communicate between the administration and the common mass. All sorts of official informations, application forms for jobs, electricity, water, and even for the individual ration cards will be available online and instantly for 24 hours via Net. Parallel to the public sector administrations, hospitals, nursing homes, libraries and all other voluntary services and organizations will be connected through the Net. For the convenience of the common people, intermediate Internet booths (like the local telephone

exchanges) will be operated which will communicate the vital nodes throughout the state resulting smooth and fast operation of the Net. Clearly the vision behind this effort is absolutely magnificent. This will lessen the hazards encountered in various public sectors while dealing with the problems of common people and to lubricate the dynamism of activity in the administration and secretariat.

Parallel to these kind of individual philanthropic activities, the open market policy in our country puts the role of VSNL (Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited) as a questionable issue. According to the present status of the Central Government policy, only VSNL will moderate all sort of Internet connections (institutional as well as private), upto 2004 AD. This tenure may be stretched indefinitely in future. The monopoly of VSNL as the gateway access has become a contentious issue among the people who are inclined towards the privatization of the Net administration in India.

6   THE INFORMATION FATIGUE SYNDROME: A NEW SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM

One striking social problem worldwide generated by the Internet use is *Internet Addiction.* Which, though didn't directly affect Indian mainstream society that much till now, has been widely spread among the Net users in western countries. Internet addicts are said to spend increased amount of time online and feel agitated or irritable when off-line. Even without a key-board at hand, a few make voluntary or involuntary typing movements with their fingers. Many of them have practically withdrawn themselves from mainstream social activities. Some find themselves with around 500 US $ monthly online bills which they can't afford. Some of the modern counsellars (psychoanalyst) found by extensive research on a broad group of people that excessive use of Internet use can have serious consequences, from mental depression to dropping out from school or college, *even divorce.* Nowadays, in most of the western countries, the Internet addiction has been compared to the drug addiction. Being a *behavioral addiction*[2], the Net addiction has been closely compared to the *marijuana* because the marijuana plant Cannabis Sativa contains a group of chemicals called *tetrahydrocannabinols* (*thcb*) which activates the stimuli that is activated almost in a same way by heavy Internet use. However, the *thcb* group can have more direct physiological effects than the Internet, like major physiological effects on the cardiovascular and central nervous system, (note that the Net can also have effects on the central nervous system, though smaller in extent compared to the *thcb* group) short term loss of memory, loss of balance and difficulty in completing of thought processes. According to one eminent psychiatrist, *Internet is a strong psychostimulant.* Internet addiction, like any other addiction, has sign and symptoms which can be recognized by the addict and by those close to the addicts. This addiction is technically termed as *Information Fatigue Syndrome.* Some of the possible physiological correlates of heavy Internet usage may be listed in following manner...

  • **A conditional response(increased pulse, blood pressure) to the modem connecting.**

- **An** *altered state of consciousness* **during long period of** $dyads^4$**/ small group interaction (total focus and concentration on screen, similar to a meditation/trance state)**.
- **Dreams that appeared in scrolling texts and pictures.**
- **Extreme irritability when interrupted by people/things in real life while immersed in cyberspace.**

Like all other addictions, whether a chemical addiction or another type, Net addiction also has some strong side effects on mainstream societies. The Net addiction makes users to ignore their surroundings as well as to withdraw themselves from the activities of the mainstream societies, they even intend to commit crimes when their online activities are interrupted by somebody. *Chat rooms*[3] are said to be the most addictive aspects of the Internet. According to Dr. Howard Shaffer, the associate director of the division of addiction at Harvard University and Dr.Ivan Goldberg, MD Psychiatry of the *Internet addiction support Group*, the most fatal and widespread effects of the Internet addiction to the Net users is abruptly reduced (or even completely given up in many cases) important occupational, interactive and recreational activities because of excessive use of the Net which, in turn, affects the mainstream society resulting the complete demolition of well-organized intrasocietal interaction pattern.

Internet addiction is considered to be a serious social problem where treatments and remedies need to be sincerely found out. The most prominent effort in this aspect is the *Centre For On-line Addiction* (*COLA*) which is a *cyberclinic* devoted to study the cyberspace addiction headed by Dr. Kimberly S. Young. Some other voluntary online cyberclinics are also established to fight against the Net addiction among which the most promising one is the *Internet Addiction disorder support Group* by Dr. Ivan Goldberg.

7   FUTURE PERSPECTIVE (GLOBAL)

30 years back, Telecommunication maestro Marshall Macluhan launched the dream of making *global village* ; which is not far from reality today with the gigantically powerful cybercommunication system in hand - the Internet. It should not sound over exaggerated if the Internet is called the *most powerful and the largest machine ever constructed by human race.* With around 50 thousand networks, 6.6 million computers and 30 million daily users, this *information super-highway* has linked 160 countries of the world. In 1993, The Clinton administration of USA made a very important administrative planning - *National Information Infrastructure* (*NII*) the aim of which was to create a *network of computer networks* which will allow the integration of computer hardware, software, telecommunications and shells that will make it easy to connect people with one another via computers and the access towards a vast array of services and information will be widely open by this effect. A proper application of this will lead us to the concept of *Global Information Infrastructure* (*GII*) under the operation of which the the remotest part of the globe can be connected to any other place of any country within a fraction of a second. In a recent interview given to The Newsweek magazine,

Prof. Russell Newmann (head, department of International communication, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard) said that the future global village, independent of the geographical and political barrier, would be built on the basis of mentality of the members of different mainstream societies. People having same or almost same mentality and way of thinking will be grouped together to make a united, clean and egalitarian new society with its own culture adopted from, and given back to the Net culture. But will this dream of equality among the people be fulfilled? Will a person from a poverty stricken third world country get equal opportunity and facilities in comparison to a Net user from Western capitalist countries having a strong financial background (which usually makes all the differences in mainstream societies) in that global village? Or, more precisely, do the people coming from different financial and social background *really* acquire equal prestige in the Net culture? Does the Net culture support that much democracy? If so, who will determine the ultimate fate of the human race, is it the class of *couch potatoes*, sitting lazily and having the computer mouse in hand , who will dictate the future of mankind? The spreading of Net across the globe at exploding rate makes the whole human race to face all these very very crucial questions. Effort will be made to provide the answers of these questions in next sections.

8   QUO VADIS ?

The whole analysis of this work reflects the idea that the structure of the mainstream societies as well as the activities of its members *do get influenced very much by the pansocietal superstructure of the Internet and by the culture evolved in it.* This invites the following most fundamental questions....

- **Does the Net society and its culture support that much democracy which can make us dream to have a future society where everybody will get equal share of all fundamental rights in a socialistic infrastructure?**

if not, then......

- **Will the Net culture, along with its social stratification, lead us to a future world where various essential resources will be accumulated only among the people having strong financial background, e,g, will the global village become a capitalism dominated society?**

and in the worst case.....

- **Does the Net culture contain that many elements of anarchism which can demolish all the ethical values in future mainstream societies as well as in the global village by creating an ethically crippled future generation void of principles and values?**

To draw the final conclusion by searching the answers of the questions addressed above, it is necessary to have a critical eye on the classification of the mainstream societies in *anthropological, economic and political viewpoint* and to the structured correlation of the Net culture with it.

One important way in which anthropologists classify different societies is *according to the degree to which different groups within a society have unequal access to the advantages such as resources, prestige and power* (*Ember and Ember(1990) , Murphy(1989), Nanda(1991), Howard(1989)*). The stratification of different groups within a society gives rise to three different type of societies being generally recognized......

(i) **Egalitarian Society:** *Societies with the least stratification.*

(ii) **Ranked Society:** *People are divided into hierarchically ordered groups that differ in terms of social prestige, but not significantly in terms of accesses to resources of power.*

(iii) **Class-based Society:** *People are divided into hierarchically ordered groups that differ in terms of access not only to prestige, but also and mainly to resources and power.*

However, though the reciprocity of exchanging various resources and the new concept of acquiring prestige (already discussed at the beginning) apparently represents the *semi-egalitarian* features of the pan-societal Net superstructure, the individual wealth necessary to support the cost of the Net access via a commercial carrier limits the number of people from mainstream societies to access the facilities of the Net which clearly indicates the presence of strong capitalism on Net culture. It is quite obvious from the argument given above that until and unless Government from all the mainstream societies can provide equal financial facility to all the members of the society for accessing the Net, which is far from reality in approximately all the class-based societies, instead of being egalitarian one, the future global village will obviously become a strongly capitalism dominated society. So it seems that the *only way* to make the global village strongly egalitarian is the establishment of socialism in all the mainstream societies. Regarding the Net culture, because supporting advanced computer technology is strongly involved with the question of national wealth, it is quite obvious that for all the mainstream societies, percentage right as well as the scope to contribute their individual cultures to the melting pot of the grand Net culture will depend on their society wise financial strength inequality of which clearly indicates that the Net culture also will be dominated by the members of the financially onward societies only. In such a culture, though apparently the process of acquiring prestige is newly defined, ultimately individual, as well as the national wealth will be the only dominant factor.

Along with the above mentioned complexities, there is a strong possibility that Net culture may deteriorate the ethical values in the future generation of the mainstream societies worldwide by some of the anarchical activities of its misusers. Though the absence of a centralized decision-making body and its rule-of-the-people approach of the Net seems, at first, to accord classical democracy a good likeness to the political structure of the Net, however, the approach of the classical orthodox democracy is *not* a good metaphor for the political structure of the Net because in practice, democracy is best seen as a principle involving political consent and control on the part the governed that may find expressions in various political practices and forms of government, which, in practice, is absent in the Net culture. Rather the Net is viewed as an anarchy by many of its members,

though this anarchism is not as formal as the nineteenth century definitions of anarchism described by *Michael Bakunin* and *Peter Kropotkin* essence of which are (*Hagopian(1985)*) .....

- **The negation of state.**
- **The abolition of private properties.**
- **Revolution.**
- **The rejection of religion.**
- **The foundation of a new co-operative order.**

Judging from the revolutionary tone of the above list, apparently it seems quite incompatible to describe the Net culture as an anarchy. As for example, till today no claim has been made that because the Net society is an anarchy, it should advocate the rejection of religion. (Rather there are many websites which configure profound persuasion in favour of different religions of vary many diverse mainstream societies.) So what then does it mean if the Net culture is described as an anarchy? The following section provides insight into it.

The term anarchy comes from *anarch*, which means *without leader*. Taking the definition of anarchy as a society with no government that policies itself by peer review, and with no laws imposed by central authority, the Net perfectly fits the bill as the anarchist's philosophy of individual responsibility is completely fulfilled in this culture. Though here the term *individual* may not always indicate the individuality of a single user rather it points out mostly to the individual websites. In general, the system administrator or the webmaster is the absolute ruler of his site which, in fact makes the sites a *dictatorship rather than anarchy* when considered individually. (This is not necessarily bad always because many are benevolent dictatorship.) At the same time there is no possibility where system administrator (or webmaster) of a particular site can set the rule for any other site and there is absolutely no concept of any *super administrator* which will govern all the individual sites of the Net. So the Net is *not* centrally governed although the individual sites are. Thus even though *locally* the individual sites may not, the Net as a whole can really be described as a *co-operative anarchy* which carries the following features of anarchism...

- **Absence of government.**
- **No form of centrally imposed control.**
- **No mechanism available for correction to take place at a Net-wide level.**

Another very uncomfortable feature of the Net culture is the demolition of identity and ethnic heritage of a classical society. *Every member, every information, every individual deep thought is nothing but just a number, a website, an IP address[8] in the Net culture.*

9   EPILOUGE

So ultimately it seems that though the Net culture has prominent positive effects on mainstream societies, *central control of it should always be in proper hands* because *computers can never take over human being as long as the question of ethical sense is concerned.* We thus always should keep in mind that the Internet, being immensely powerful to change the whole structure of the human society, *should*

be handled very very carefully with the intent of philanthropic activities. Internet, the *most crowning achievement* from the present technology, can be described as a sharp weapon. Whether the use of this weapon should be as a surgical knife to operate the evils of the society or as a killing chopper, that decision is left to the humanism of its users as well as to the future generation.

10   GLOSSARY OF SELECTED TECHNICAL TERMS

(i) **ARPANET :** The world's first computer network was a U.S. government-funded wide area network called the ARPANET (*Advanced Research Project Agency Network*). The first ARPANET *Information Message Processor* (IMP) was installed on Sept 1, 1969 which had only 12 KB of memory although they were considered to be powerful minicomputers of their time. In the early 1980's the ARPANET was split into two separate networks, the new counterpart was the MILNET, a non-classified US military network which is still in service having it's headquarter in Virginia. For an excellent overview of the history of the Net, see
The History Of The Net
Master's Thesis by Henry Edward Hardy
School Of Communications
Grand Valley State University

(ii) **Behavioral Addiction :** A behavioral addiction is one in which an individual is addicted to an action and *not necessarily* a substance. Here people may become addicted to activities even when there is no true physiological dependence.

(iii) **Chat Room :** Users within the Net community electronically interact with each other through *chat* programs which provides a textual interaction amongst its users. Participants do not speak to each other, rather they type their *dialogue* at their computer key board which then appear on the screens of all the other users on-line. Websites devoted to this business is called *chat rooms.*

(iv) **Dyads :** Online interaction between *two* persons via computer.

(v) **Emoticons :** The lack of verbal and visual cues in the textual medium of the Net has resulted in its users developing and adopting symbols (which *can* be typed by key board) to clarify their emotional intent. Those symbols are called *emoticons.* For detail informations and a complete list of the emoticons, see
The New Hacker's Dictionary
Raymond, E. ed (1993)
2nd edn. Cambridge: MIT Press

(vi) **FTP :** The Net enables its users to copy files from different other computers on the Net and their own keeping the original source file intact. This process is called *file transfer* and the program that is used for this purpose is called *File Transfer Protocol* (*FTP*).

(vii) **Internauts :** The person who surfs through the Internet.

(viii) **IP Address :** Any computer connected in the Net has its own and *unique* number (like 206.101.167.195) which is used to identify or to refer that computer in the Network System.

(ix) **Newbies :** A person who surfs through different websites are named as *webies* so new webies are referred by this term.

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