

DIGITAL DICTATORS

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Technology is seductive and a double-edged sword. It can be a useful tool to connect or it can be a brutal weapon to control. If technology is the servant and if it is used with wisdom to enhance human relationships, without polluting the environment and without wasting natural resources then technology can be good. But if technology becomes the master, and human creativity and ecological integrity are sacrificed at the altar of technology then technology becomes a curse.

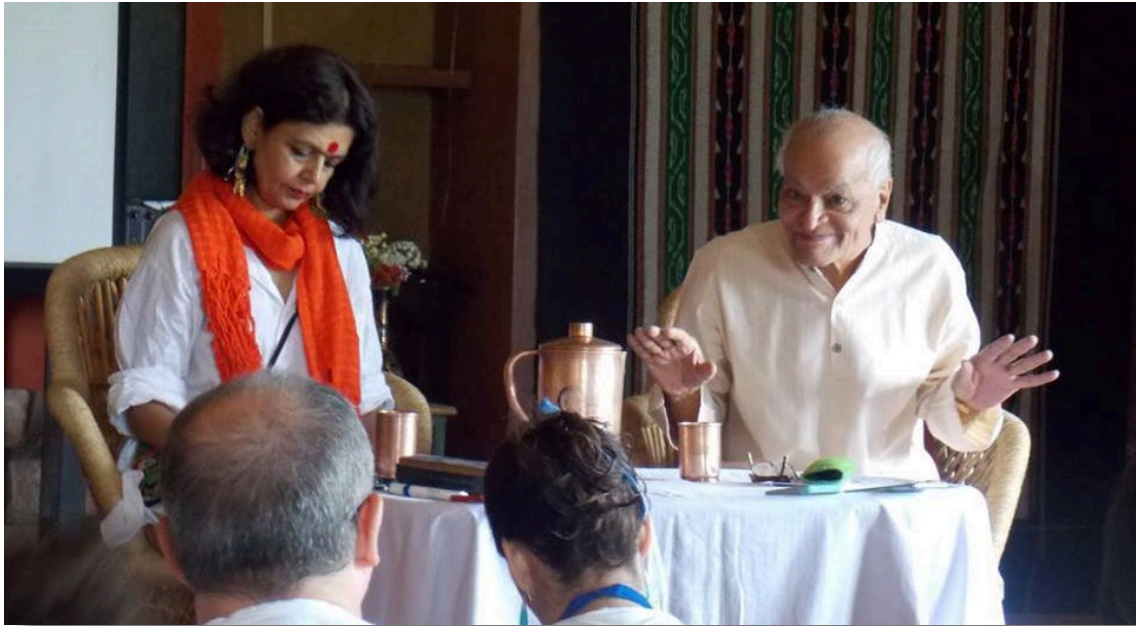
In the recent past New York governor, Andrew Cuomo, Bill Gates of Microsoft and former Google CEO, Eric Schmidt, have been promoting the idea of transforming face to face learning to a system of education rooted in internet technology and operated by remote control. Thereby, integrating digital technology, fully and permanently, into educational process. And by doing so getting away from the need for personal relationships and intimate interactions between students and teachers. Cuomo, Gates and Schmidt come from a school of thought which subscribes to the theory that 'technology is the solution, what is your problem?'

Unfortunately, these highly 'educated' people do not seem to know the meaning of 'education'. The word is derived from Latin 'educare'. It means to bring forth or lead out or draw out what is potentially already there.

Every human person comes into this world with his or her own unique potential. The work of a true teacher is to observe and spot that special quality in a child and help to nurture it and enhance it with care, attention, and empathy. Thus, the beautiful idea of education is to maintain human diversity, cultural diversity, and diversity of talents through decentralised, democratic, human scale and personalised systems of schooling.

A good school is a community of learners where education is not pre-determined by remote authorities, rather it is a journey of exploration where students, teachers and parents are working together to discover right ways to relate to the world and to find meaningful means of living in the world.

The idea of digital learning through remote control and pre-determined curriculums moves away from the rich and holistic philosophy of education. Digital teaching looks at children as if they were empty vessels in need of being filled with external information. The quality of information or knowledge given to the child remotely and digitally is determined centrally by people who have a vested interest in a particular outcome. And that outcome is largely to turn humans into instruments to run the money machine and to increase the profitability of big corporations.



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Such centralised and impersonalised systems of digital education will destroy diversity and impose uniformity, destroy community culture, and impose corporate culture, destroy multiple cultures, and impose monoculture.

When teachers teach remotely, they tend to think as if the children have no body, no hands, and no heart. They have only a head. The information taught digitally is almost entirely of intellectual nature. Thus, digitally educated children are less than half educated. Eating half baked bread gives you indigestion; life of a half-educated person lacks coherence and integrity. A proper education should include the education of the head, education of the heart and education of the hands. In an ideal school community, children learn maths with music, science with spirituality and history with a human touch. Academic knowledge is complemented by the learning of the arts and crafts.

A computer cannot teach kindness. Only in a real learning community can children learn how to be kind, how to be compassionate and how to be respectful. In a school community, children learn together, play together, eat together, and laugh together. They produce plays and perform concerts together. They go on field trips together. It is through these shared human activities that children gain a deep appreciation of life. Education is more than the acquisition of information and facts; education is a living experience. Sitting in front of a computer for hours is no way to learn social skills.

Placing the future of our children in the hands of a few digital giants like Google, Microsoft and Amazon and putting them in charge of educational systems is a recipe for digital dictatorship and opens the doors to disaster. If democratic societies are opposed to military dictatorship, then why should they embrace corporate dictatorship? Through smart technologies these giant corporations will be able to trace and exploit every activity of children and later, when they are adults, through data

manipulation and control. Who wants to embrace such 'dystopia'?

Rather than investing in top down, artificial, sedative, and virtual technology, democratic societies should be investing in people. We should be investing in more teachers in smaller schools, with smaller class sizes and bottom up, imaginative, benign, and appropriate technology.

We have already experienced the way algorithms, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and other forms of so-called smart technologies have been used to control, manipulate and undermine democratic values. The techno giants who consider humans as 'biohazards' cannot be trusted with the future of our children. We should be embracing the Green New Deal and not what Naomi Klein rightly condemns as the Screen New Deal.

We need the greening of education rather than the screening of education. Our children need to learn not only about nature but from nature. They need to learn from forests and farming, from permaculture and agriculture, from agro-ecology and organic gardening, from marine life and wildlife. Such knowledge and skills cannot be learned by looking at computer screens.

A computer is a box. It teaches you to think within the box. If you want to think outside of the box, you need to go out into your community, and out into the natural world.

Children need to go out in nature with experienced teachers. Nature herself is the best and the greatest teacher. With the combination of human teacher and nature teacher assisted by a limited amount of internet, children will gain a much more rounded education than through a digitally controlled and centralised system proposed by the techno giants.

Technology has a place in education but let us keep it in its place and not allow technology to dominate our lives and the lives of our children. Technology is a good servant but a bad master.



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