

Mobile: The Home of the traveller.

Santhosh H K

Abstract

This thesis is a cultural inquiry on the changes brought in our social life by mobile culture as the mobile turns forty. Mobiles are capable not only to ensure social relations but also to detach a person from their social environment. Mobiles which were introduced as a social communication device, but in reality, are destroying sociality and create micro networks. But in modern society it makes formation of communities possible.

Key words: Mobile, Digital sociability, Cyber culture, Chat

'Alexander Graham Bell must have been an excellent paramour, because the most significant feature of the telephone is to enter into your lover's room without her husband noticing. Ignoring all the material world, he entered into her body as an echo. By that time, he must be experiencing a ghost-like weightlessness. Because a paramour is a posthumous being'.

- T Sreevalsan(Marjaran)

Man, who developed into a modern citizen by building the fortifications of culture by sticking to any soil, has preserved the mind of a nomad who has never tamed in his cultural history. Although he developed a native identity, he also maintained the friendship and interest for foreigners. During uncomfortable physical environment he turns to these imaginary friendships for shelter. By communicating with foreign friends he is able to maintain his small imaginary tribe. Man's addiction of boundary-free communications and the exploitative nature of capitalism were the sources for the spontaneous revolution of communication technology.

Migration to urban spaces disturbed the undisturbed flakes of human communication and privacy. Not only do they have to endure the most intimate strangeness in this mob culture that infringes on their privacy, there was a double conflict in the citizen's exchange zone that he had to stay away from relatives who were emotionally close to him. It is the introduction to land phones that began to mock this physical distance.

However, the landline phone only enables the type of communication that is established in only from certain place. Hence it strengthened institutions and bureaucratic structures more than people. Phones helped in the growth of hierarchy of economic power focusing on urban areas. Land phones were crucial in the growth of corporates.

The introduction of mobiles helped to free the individual from space constraints and enable him to make free exchanges. Mobile phones were a revolution to overthrow existing urban communication system hence mobiles were expanded quickly. By the year 2001, the number of mobiles crossed the number of televisions. The most noticeable change was solving the barriers in communication between developed and undeveloped countries. And with that, popularity of smart phones with multimedia applications and internet enabled mobile phone to be a more convenient device than PCs and laptops. Mobile, that initially attracted men and later women to the market, now has its focus on kids. One after another, new models have entered the market with the most user-friendly and fun variety for kids. Thus it could be said there is no other device that has influenced man by completely differentiating the distinctions such as gender age land economic class social status religion.

No other device has been as influential as mobiles, which were introduced in India in the 90s, in the last fifty decades. The popularity of mobiles were that rapid. Most celebrated devices like television, computers, and the Internet could indulge only in certain segments of the society, and curiosity period of some of these devices faded

soon. But the toy box of the mobile phone is still in its teenage, even at the age of forty. Soon, even in India it crossed the number of television sets and land phones. Its not a surprise to a sociologist that the number of mobiles has crossed the number of toilets in the country. The basic premise of the mobile phone is that it has gone from being a basic means of communication to fulfilling many of the individual desires and needs of modern civil society.

Even if mobiles left behind all sorts of technology in terms of social and personal impact of expansion and use, it is a surprise that there has not been much study related to the sociology of mobile communication in Communication Studies or Sociology streams. When we compare the volume of studies on the less influential device like television and cyber world, it feels like mobile has not been that influential at all.

Although mobile was introduced through an elite class of high-ranking business executives, politicians, IT professionals from metro cities, its class nature has changed. Networks expanded from highways to village areas. Mobile became a necessity for people who work in basic employment sector like fishermen, coconut tree climber, workshop employees, grocers, and so on. Within years, incoming calls became free, handsets became cheaper, call rates became low, emergence of private companies, expansion of mobile towers and it helped this over growth of mobiles. In the early days it was the news of the protest against the mobile towers due to the fear of radiation in the newspapers, later came distress for the installation of the mobile towers. To set up a television, there needed a safe house and an electricity connection but mobiles could be used by gypsies and foreign workers without other facilities. It would have been difficult to imagine the Tamils who were washing toilets, phoning and listening to music on all the three corners of the vehicle, would become Internet users or computer owners. But even a villager of the lowest strata would also fall into a mobile network without a doubt. It is the omnipresent influence of mobiles. Even television channels which depended on

advertisements, depend also on SMS now for income. It can be said that telecommunications is the most invested as well as most corrupted sector.

In 1994, when National Telecom Policy was being drafted, only one out ten people had phone facility in India. In fifteen years, tele density increased by 32 percent. It is when private sector was introduced in telecommunication area, the growth rate of tele density increased to thirty percent. According to the records of 2009, ten million subscribers join telecommunications per month. This is when land phone growth declined and people began to switch to mobiles. Comparing to China, Brazil and other countries which are more extensive than India, India was way behind in mobile coverage. The difference among states are also wide. Some studies even argued that the growth of telecommunication sector influences the development of India directly. According to the report by Vodafone company in 2009, the growth rate of states was influenced the most by the popularity of mobiles. The studies by Sanjay Gandhi, Surabhi Mithal, Gaurav Tripadi talk about how the changes brought by mobiles in the industrial sector, agricultural sector are highly remarkable.

It is curious to study about the subtle changes created by mobile phones in the social and private life of an individual.

It can said that a mobile phone is a the device that is most customized by a person according to their individuality. The mobile is the most seen and touched device in a person's day. Naturally, the device of mobile has become an integral part of our lives. Mobiles are used more for private emotional exchanges than for socioeconomic exchanges. Even the people who are not socially active in daily life, people who do not talk much, are also equally active in mobile communication. Just because you don't have a mobile phone means none needs you for an essential thing. Not that you do not need them. This social pressure is also what pushes a person initially to the mobile web.

Mobiles are capable not only to ensure social relations but also to detach a person from their social environment. Many people use mobile phones as a good way to overcome sudden isolation, strangeness, apathy or restlessness. We are the ones who get up and escape from the boring speeches as if to attend a call. Not only on train journeys, meetings, marriage functions, and lonely bus rides, but also when strange friendships start about and glare us, we often turn to mobile screens for solace. Women are who make use of this more efficiently. Many women find that getting engaged on a phone call is an easy way to dismiss perverts.

This is a way to convince strangers that they have a private and secure network around them always. There are plenty of people who set false calls also.

Just playing with the phone is also a way to express that you are not interested or bored in any social event. It could also be during a romantic conversation or an official meeting. In the same way, switching off mobile phone, is to show some seriousness of context. It is to notify the lover that their time is exclusive for the lover.

Mobile calls during office hours or private conversations or ceremonies often tend to ruin the whole essence or sometimes the social event itself. Companions will be intolerant of such calls. At the same time a multifaceted phone owner will find a hard time to satisfy his dual personality as one. Sometimes, there are gestures, facial expressions, laughter, and touches as they struggles to keep in touch with their physical environment social relationships.

Scrutiny shows us that the mobile connections that follow us through the ways we travel, do not make us free. For guardians, mobiles are a way to spy their children. When the children are far apart and their phones are switched off, the parents are often highly distressed. Studies show that more than men, it is women who feel the lack of freedom in such instances. When a wife switches off their phone, it is seen as an absolute offense to many people. Higher officials also feel the same way.

Another problem is mediation of physical environment. A phone call from the boss during a leisure time at the bar with friends or a personal call during a social event are situations that put up a challenge for the actor is us.

For work related purpose, an insurance agent or a sales executive or a subordinate employee can always connect with their higher official or colleagues, which is a great facility the mobile phone offers. In a regular office structure, it is not easy to get the appointment of a higher official but through phone a person is able to have open and informal conversation with the superior and able to get appointments easily. While it is said about empowering individuals on many levels, one should not be surprised at the fact that the self-determination and self reliance of the individual, even in decision-making, are at risk when there are people at their fingertips for advice on anything. That makes our responsibilities heavier. "You could have called and asked, don't you have a mobile with you?!" is what authority would scream.

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Another change that mobile phones have made in a person's social life is that it enables a person to live dual lives with several personalities at the same time. It helped create a fluidity according to which an individual can flow in any discrete direction according to his wish. Today, it is not dual lives or work for a married

working woman with office administration and household administration. While at office itself she is able to check on the kitchen, monitor her children's studies as well as look after her husband's dining with the help of mobile phones. The modern family can always carry a touch of parenting on with them.

This way, at the same time a lot of micro emotional networks can be dealt without conflicts so that such relationships become spontaneous and impulsive. Most of these are peripheral. Because distant relationships which solely depend on voice notes and texts are majority, it is easier for one to camouflage oneself cleverly and to showcase oneself however and whenever they want. It tempts us to get involved in hundreds of romantic relationships and friendships simultaneously. Mobile phones and Internet make the new age of flirting, technologically equipped. 'For a celibate maiden, fresh love is like a chrysanthemum bracelet if one breaks, the other' such a Changampuzha time has passed. Now a person is able to continue these without breakups.

Such a floating identity development is not insignificant, with rifts happening within the relatively solid family and social structures. This leads to mutual disbeliefs, suspicions and helplessness among individuals within a family. The problem is one who sleeps with you does not know your sickness. Land phone was a more social and general device. It enabled to control, manage and share about rifts happening within and outside the family. The manager of the land phone would be the father. Rest used to be care-of calls. It would be through another person we often get the person we wanted to talk to and sometimes it was necessary to make small talks with the person answering the call. We might have to reveal our identities or even explain the purpose for the call. Sometimes unpleasant questions would be asked, at least unpleasant sounds or expressions or some kind of unpleasant gestures would be made. Because land phone is a common property of a family. We are under public surveillance even when we have to make a paid call from a public telephone booth. But we are not allowed to control the awkward gestures and sounds made by a fellow who talks on mobile phone while hanging on to a very

crowded train. A mobile phone is a highly personalized device, all kinds of customization like setting ring tones, naming the phone, installing applications, setting wallpapers, selecting dial tones are extremely personal choices. Mobile is seen as an individual's personal space within his own control. It is a big change to see women and children use mobile phones. Even the phone model is according to one's own discretion. Each person registers as an adult individual in the sim registration form. Phone thus becomes his/hers/their own private property. It even works as a device made to question the patriarchal norms. Like in America, a person becomes an adult when he owns a car, in India he becomes an adult when he owns a phone. This way when home becomes a collective of individual islands, the intimacy among them naturally reduces. Even children comment that it is infringement of their privacy for their parents to check the call log or inbox of their mobile device. There lies awake, a phone, as a mysterious untouchable device for any person other than its owner. Untimely phone calls and silently illuminated messages create caverns among couples.

Mobiles which were introduced as a social communication device, but in reality, are destroying sociality and create micro networks. But in modern society it makes formation of communities possible. So mobile conversations are full of the formalities and emotional turmoil of pre-modern sensations and are often filled with gestures and silences and sounds. Mobiles make way for more emotional fulfilment than landlines. Texting, which is a mix of abbreviations, smileys, stickers, change into another dialect which destroys formal composition of language. Most times, texting has a nature of a universal register. The facilities of forward messages and bulk messages often tend to break the communication web centre.

Mobile phones and social networking enable to retain mysterious personal relationships that do not have social openness. It is trans spatial. A person in Canada is able to communicate with a native girl through chat. Within hours, it became a mobile phone interaction. Within days it creates a fake emotional intimacy. It develops to short trips and meeting when the person comes back to native place for

a short vacation. They are able to keep this relationship private from even their family and their personal lives within themselves also. Also to go back to their respective places. Through phone may be they can maintain the relationship, or they could end this relationship by changing the sim. This way mobile phones help both men and women to maintain such mysterious lives and underground romances. Relationship which do not require any social expressions are formed. It informs us that the time of old Arab marriages are over. Such pleasure seeking skin ties sometimes end up into sex rackets and traps. Another aspect of this if the introduction of the agencies that allow us to spend hours talking and flirting to fictional people with whom we can share our desires and dislikes. Teenagers are often attracted to this world of sexual illusions.

The influence mobile phones have on our mental health is shocking. Although mobiles have enabled the individual to create and live in a social environment that suits him or her free from the social realities around him or her, it has also brought the individual to a kind of abyss that mobile phones are prone to. Like the decision to stay away from Face book, it becomes a difficult and more complicated decision to switch off their mobile phones. It requires plenty of self courage. Also for a friend who exists on this social contract, it seems like a social evil that he cuts off the telephone connection. Is telephone really making a person free? Statistics say that a person checks their phone at least elevation times an hour. In this the number of interpersonal interactions are low, most are just to touch and feel the phone, to check the inbox or for games. Often it is a narcissistic trend associated with mobile interactions. It is pampering oneself. It has no social openings. Just like how new mothers go check on their infant in the crib, we pamper our phones while at work or whenever we are free just like a toy. It provides us with unending childhood.

Silence, interruptions and temporary disconnects are at the core of any communication system. This disruptions make the communication context more engaging. To remove such disruptions and provide continuous connections for people is perhaps a difficult communication crisis. The sound of ring when you were

waiting for a call that had not been called for many days, the unexpected letter received, the reunion of lovers after a short period. The pain of separation, melancholy, holding tightly when united. The stories waiting to be told, strangeness, awkwardness, sudden expressions of love, we fall into unfamiliar connections where we lose all of these. It was possible to re-think or reconsider who you are to me when you sat aside is distress or when the one is out of the leaf. But we who always carried home as a nest, close to our heart now is far from even nostalgia of it. Like a burning cross, we carry our vows everywhere we go. When the struggles of the snake without a hoof are over, we get kurma incarnation.

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