THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY AND ITS CONTEMPORARY SPACE; 'BECOMING DIGITAL'

Mamata R
Maharani's Science College for Women Bengaluru.

Abstract
The paper attempts to discuss the tenet of human existence i.e., the question of identity by the intelligentsia from the time immemorial across the culture and civilizations. Some of the major and successful endeavours responsible for establishing the discourse of Identity are briefly focussed. Essentially the multiple and contradicting nature of the problem enables scholar to apply diverse approach in observation and analysis. Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization have amplified the growth and development of the contemporary world to an extent which forced the responsible minds to think and inevitably adapt the policy of sustainable growth. Nevertheless technology with its ever advancing generations has influenced the life of the people in all dimensions. The relationship between man and machine now entered the phase beyond that of dependency and over dependency with the omniscient and omnipresent expression of technology. The pandemic crises since couple of years has no longer left the 'digitalization' as an option for the world but turned as a mode of survival. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence and its effect on future life is at present little comprehendible and surpasses one of the wildest imagination for sure. The paper proposes to discuss the stance of 'identity' hitherto expressed in different perceptions and at present its fate in digital world. The analytical and qualitative approach and relevant theories are applied.

Key words: Identity, Sense of belonging, Digital Communities, Globalization, Artificial Intelligence.

"In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity"
-Erik Erikson

Introduction

Since the evolution of mankind on this planet, the major concern of the species is none other than the discovery of self. Throughout the ages we witness the tireless endeavour is directed towards- to pursue, establish, subvert, alter, assert, moderate and come in terms with the question of identity once the early phases of understanding and harmony is achieved with nature. Humans with the cognitive ability set out for this empirical journey by comparing and contrasting with sub human, living and non-living organisms as the first step approaching further mile stones of history created through discoveries and inventions. The irksome and elusive question of 'identity' travelled along with other pursuits and never settled even with other boastful revelations. Classified efforts in different streams and disciplines in this regard resulted in the surge of discourses in the field of mythology, philosophy, logic, and poetics and approaches of science and remained the crux of 'isms' and ideologies. The objective of the paper is to attempt and explore the problem by citing few areas of knowledge and negotiating the argument of digital identity.

First to begin with myths of many faiths, man's question of identity is resolved with the benevolent almighty the creator for creating man in his own image. For those who are unlikely content with the limited idea of being just creation only and expected to follow certain codes then some philosophers came to rescue with their introspective analysis. The earliest expressions of wisdom like **'Tat Tvam Asi,** Sanskrit maxim means "thou are that" and The ancient Greek aphorism **"know thyself"** have successfully sown the seeds of interrogation of self, the path to be followed only by austere thinkers. Nothing might have established the supremacy of rationality, logic and reasoning than the following Latin cogito, *ergo sum-* "I think therefore I am" by Rene Descartes. Apparently the concept of Civilization and Nation state defined people's identity for all the practical purposes for many this continued as the matter of pride and privilege, however for few geniuses like Diogenes the same turned out as restraint when he declared that he is not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world-impetus statement for 'Global Citizenship' promoting today popularly known as cosmopolitan identity which is long back in Indian tradition culture being adopted as the principle of *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire are worthy names to be mentioned here for their everlasting love for the spirit of mankind's freedom over all kind

of suppression and domination by power structure. The question of identity is dealt very radically by nihilists such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Sartre in fact Nietzsche clearly claimed "the exemplary human being must craft his/her own identity through self-realization and do so without relying on anything transcending that life-such as God or a soul".(Wilkerson, 2021). In eastern tradition primarily in Indian perspective one must admit that the question of identity is entwined with spirituality, fundamentally the state of enlightenment is the path proposed by Buddha, Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Kabeer and all.

The advent of science particularly the post Industrial revolution resulted in the transitional phase in all walks of life. The dynamics of belonging encountered myriad issues and resulted in multiple and paradoxical interpretations of man's identity in the backdrop of modernity. Amidst the phenomenal breakthroughs in the field of science and technology, some masters became responsible for the essential paradigm shift for the birth of the new century. The paper attempts to summon the contributions of Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marks and their influence on subverting the question of identity in the turn of the century. Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution with the publication of *Origin of Species* (1859) forced mankind to be humble as he is descendant of apes therefore no higher claims of superiority in his relationship with the environment. Sigmund Freud with his seminal research in psycho analysis revealed the personality and Identity crisis in much complex stances of conscious, sub consciousness level. This phenomenon had problematized the cause of identity further to talk less about personality and more about persona. Karl Marx, the name to be acknowledged for creating awareness of 'self' in accordance with social, political, economic and cultural dimensions, in short providing a holistic approach to address class conflicts and be assertive of one's own identity in the society which is functioning on the basis of power relations. The problem of gender as an identity discourse in academics emerged as a major negotiation in past two centuries and brought about many waves in feminism. Rightfully now 'women' earlier degraded with the 'second sex' status have started acquiring legitimate place in the society. 'LGBT' expressions' gaining an assertive tone is a revolutionary in breaking the binary barriers of gender. Apartheid as a state apparatus worked as tool to maintain racial hierarchy depriving blacks from dignity of identity. Walter Benn Michaels in his essay '*Race into Culture: A critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity*' says:

The myth of the Negro past, in other words, was that he had none, that he was either completely a creature of the culture imposed upon him in the slavery or that he had no culture at all, and, insofar as Negroes were themselves brought to accept this view, Herskovits regarded them as the victims of cultural imperialism. (Walter, 1995, p. 53-54)

In the massive canvas the picture of 'identity' is incomplete without being painted 'diaspora'-group identity construct. Diaspora as an identity tag has travelled long enough to enter the zone of growth and expansion from the stigmatic position of rootlessness. In the history of mankind one of the darkest chapters is of Imperialism which violently divided the identities as coloniser and the colonised. Edward Said in his celebrated study 'Orientalism' observes the interpretation of west about east. Xiaomei Chen in his essay 'Occidentalism as Counter discourse: "He Shang" in Post-Mao China writes:

 Said seeks to show how Western imperialist images of its colonial others- images that, of course, are inevitably and sharply at odds with the self-understanding of the indigenous non-Western cultures they purport to represent-not only govern the West's hegemonic policies, but were imported into the West's political and cultural colonies where they affected native points of view and thus served as instruments of domination themselves. (Chen, 1995, p. 63).

The paper tries to conclude the first part of the argument by addressing 'marginality' as an inclusive term and tenet of dichotomy of identity. Meenakshi Thapan and Valerie Raoul addresses   'marginality' like this "Marginality may be experienced through differences based on gender, race, age, ability, and social or economic status, as well as religious linguistics affiliations. To experience marginality is to experience exclusion in some form from the mainstream". (Thapan&Raoul, 2010, p.2). These are some deliberations on the problem of identity.

In first part, the paper has attempted to highlight some of the prominent discourses of the idea of identity. Further paper tries to address the problem of identity with reference to the contemporary situation based on digital

identity. The concept of 'Simulacrum' although largely used in the field of philosophy, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze have extended its scope to psyche and expressions of the mind. For Baudrillard, the simulacrum is essentially the copy of a copy, that is to say, the copy of something that is not itself an original. The state of simulacrum at highest level can be observed in the life of social media obsessed people. Basically a platform meant for mutual exchange of expressions, at individual level it differs from person to person may transform in to the space of mania, narcissism and any kind of disorders. The dangerous things in this scenario is, faking of not just activities but of emotions are also possible without much distinction made between fake and real at a conscious level.

Digital community as name suggests is a community which is interconnected with each other through internet for common purpose or interest. With the emergence of globalization initially in the field of trade and commerce gradually encompassed all other activities and interests of people to turn a world of different culture and practices literally into one small unit of 'Global Village' as McLuhan calls it. The residents of the 'village' can know and communicate with each other without ever met. The growth of online tendency largely in the field of technical work, education, consultation has made a larger impact in the lifestyle of the people of developed as well as developing countries. In the recent time of pandemic the shift was not only desirable but proved inevitable. The versatile social platforms like face book, WhatsApp, You Tube Channels, twitter and instagram, supported by internet indeed helped the people of all strata to express their wishes, talent, anguishes and hence internet without doubt can be acknowledged for being a tool for implementing democratic way of life and bringing positive change in the hierarchical society. The dark side of it is better understood with certain incidents of hacking, cyber bullying etc., which turned out as havoc in the life of its victims. The concern for present and future generation cannot be reduced by making divisions of merits and demerits of Internet. However the main analysis of the paper rests upon the question of identity in the digital community. In digital life style the problem of identity undergoes the major shift in terms of interpretations and expressions. The virtual life being led by millions of people today cannot be just paraphrased as 'an escape' (from boring, tiresome, insipid and awful reality) and cannot even be termed as a harmless parallel practice. Seriously it's been acquiring a nature of personality problems. To begin with the fake life being lived on social platforms to growing affinity towards highest technological assisted gadgets and robotics with AI for companionship. The virtual life enriched with comfort, accuracy, speed, convenience and on the other hand bereft of human emotions and empathy give rise to highly imbalanced and unforeseeable generation is a matter of concern. The relation ratio between man and machine in terms of intelligence has reached its saturation point after accomplishing half and half entity. Till here duo were inseparable and inevitable for survival but now machine backed by AI may proceed alone towards next destination as many dystopian narratives have predicted. Man's dependency on machine increasing proportionately whereas machines are evolving more and more autonomous eventually causing conflict. In this decisive battle may be the ultimate one man is fated to experience acute helplessness when control is lost over something which is more powerful and blessed only with IQ and not enough EQ. The predicament of man witnessing the transformation of his creation through Servant Master Monster (SMM) phase that is evolution of something initially designed for and used as servant gradually transformed into master and consequently grown up into monster is not very far.

Conclusion
The paper attempts to shed light on the problem of identity which is universally abided by time and space with selective interpretations so far known to us. In the human existence, identity will remain as matter of dialogue and discourse till the eternity yet its analysis taken from Vedic period, in European tradition. Renaissance period with discoveries and exploration, French and Russian Revolution, Industrial Revolution and holocaust between two world wars and many more milestones with diverse and dynamic approaches have constructed and deconstructed the idea of existence and identity as a never ending phenomenon. With the advent of science and technology in the modern era only, man had started moving towards machines leaving nature behind and it seems he in the realm of collective consciousness has entered the deadlock with the sense of belonging found in the world of machines. The present manifestation of digital imbibed identity with its major characteristic features of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) needs to be addressed with serious interrogation for further

analysis. The paper in its conclusion, poses a question that mankind from time to time have continuously enjoyed the privilege of defining and interpreting the problem of identity of human existence based on different perspectives and ideologies, what if in distant future Artificial Intelligence take up the task of defining human identity and human beings have no other way than accepting it.

References

1. Chen, X. (1995). Occidentalism as Counter discourse: "He Shang" in Post-Mao China.
2. Anthony Appiah Kwame and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.(Eds.), Identities,63. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
3. Michaels,W. B. (1995).*Race into Culture: A critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity*.   Anthony Appiah Kwame and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Eds.), Identities, 53-54. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
4. Thapan, M.,&Raoul,V.(2010).*Introduction: The Dynamics of Citizenship and Belonging.* Meenakshi Thapan.(Ed.), Contested Spaces: Citizenship and Belonging in Contemporary Times,2. Orient BlackSwan, India.
5. Wilkerson,D.(2021,Dec 22). "*Friedrich Nietzsche(1844-1900).*iep.utm.edu/nietzsch/,Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy/.