



QUESTION OF THE FUTURE OF HUMAN SURVIVAL: SCIENTIFIC, RELIGIOUS, PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. Pratap Kumar Dash
C.V. Raman Global University
Bhubaneswar, India

Abstract

The paper attempts at putting forth before the readers some of the commonly perceived questions relating to the future of human survival. On the basis of evidences, it focuses on human achievements and failures so far. Then, it relates to the gradual development of human civilization that started with simple and agrarian basis and slowly got mechanised to a greater extent which has now resulted in threat to the existence of the humanity. In addition, it reflects on the prevailing controversial components of human world like discriminations, power struggle, technological progress and rat race at the cost of destruction of nature and natural habitat. In the next part, it goes on to quote some well-known scientific, religious, philosophical and literary views on the progress of the so called modern human civilization and its aftermath. This includes the very relevant views of Stephen Hawking, Michio Kaku, Nick Bostrom, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, E.F. Schumacher and messages of some of the relevant classical and religious writings advocating sole purpose of human existence on the earth.

Keywords: Human Survival, Power Struggle, Technological Progress, Rat Race, Humanitarian and Spiritual Values, Peace and Prosperity.

Introduction

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. (The Hollow Men)

The lines of T.S. Eliot still echoes within us because probably he was able to foresee the position of human existence on the earth which we realize seriously lately. In fact, in this article, I represent the views of billions of common people those who struggle throughout life to work in order to earn and to maintain livelihood. This is the voice of people those who look at the things as they are and never intelligent to think of IPR or Patent. They want just simple living. (High thinking is still a question). By the way, when such people live lives, some rhetorical questions obviously do arise like: Are we leading towards a better future? What will be the future of our children? Can we say that we have done enough to live life comfortably, reasonably as well as intelligently utilising our valuable time, brain and all-round energy or I may say synergy? If so, why are millions of scientists, leaders and trouble-shooters in a hopeless situation? Why such formless fears have become apparent in the human world? Is this the sign of the process that leads to the end of human knowledge or what?

Focus on Humanity at Large

In my opinion, the achievements of the human world so far are immense. But this kind of evaluation is going to be proved vague in long future because when there will be scarcity of air, water and light and a natural ambience, then we do not know what way human knowledge and high technology can compensate! But till date as the background heralds, we have rich mythologies springing from the creative and constructive ancient civilizations that are centuries old. The epics and scriptures written are full of very useful adages. With the guidance of this knowledge, our ancestors moved ahead finding hundreds of thousands of means of survival leaving the world with us. Art, architecture, science and technology, spirituality, agriculture, business and many other things have flourished like anything. We have created religious ideologies; formulated socio-cultural norms and identified ourselves as Asian or Europeans or Africans; may be Christians or Hindus or Muslims, etc.; saints and spiritual leaders, etc. for our better identity. Mythology has seen weird demons as well as celestial angels. History has seen the blood-thirsty dictators, brutal colonial masters; wars and struggle for power; intelligent information technology hackers; and best human leaders too. We have seen rapid industrialization; development of technology; yielding of good crops; military might and martyrs; best transportation and communication systems. With the passing time, we have been keeping pace with the changes as well as developments. We have been taking up challenges as per our intelligibility of the cause and effect of the challenges and now we are ready to incorporate wearable technologies that would detect and control our emotions.

In this process, from among us, some are recognised to be rich whereas some others are middleclass; and yet some others are poor. Some love their motherlands; some migrate to their dream destinations to settle whereas some become ecstatic to get liberation from long standing bondage in their native countries. Some make a scrutiny of democracy in its various facets and some others talk of the one world community and develop ideas of healthy politics avoiding war and enmity. We have engineered lots of tactics for



maintaining a sustainable world where attributes of nature will be available to us. We have explored the mysteries and miracles of nature; gone deep inside human brain; established the theories of aesthetics; and apart from understanding meaning of reality, we have even gone into the deep of absurdity; tried to comprehend both darkness and light. Our intellectual curiosity and efforts have made us build skyscrapers, robots, missiles, space crafts and submarines. Our researches have helped us cure many fatal diseases using most modern means of medical treatment. Soon, we are going to form internet of the mind. We have owned patents, IPRs and many other ways to acquire and implement our knowledge. In the course of time, we have seen the consequence of violence as exercised by many and therefore we adopt the means of peace and non-violence; believe in mutual cooperation, cross-cultural compatibility and developed tolerance.

In the meantime, we know that we have been living in a place which has been under threat for various reasons. It may bolt from the blue or may be the ethereal consequences like global warming, climate change and massive biodiversity, etc. Anyhow, as a global natural crisis, this has made us helpless. The climax reaches when such a human world struggles to survive from the attack of a virus. All our knowledge has been proved useless before it so far!

Now, question arises regarding the nature of work we have been doing. All our works can be categorised under the binary oppositions like illusion and reality; natural and artificial; good and bad; order and chaos, etc. The question arises that are we more in illusion for which the result leads us to disillusionment and are we artificial in most of our dealings for which we are getting estranged from things natural which in Sanskrit is vikriti as opposed to prakriti that is the natural order? In order to find answers to such questions, it would better to focus on the views of a few eminent scientists.

View point of eminent scientists

Some of the pioneers of the world of sciences opine scientifically regarding the scope and limitations of science on which we trust maximum for our future survival. To begin with, Stephen Hawking (1942-2018) in one his seminal speeches says that:

Even though we may know the relevant laws that govern the universe, we may not be able to use them to predict very far into the future. This is because the solutions to the equations of physics may exhibit a property known as chaos..... Science cannot predict the future of society, or even whether it has any future. The danger is that our power to damage or destroy the environment, or each other, is increasing much more rapidly than our wisdom in using this power. (The Future of the Universe)

This means that we cannot rely on machines, and we have to be very careful in maintaining good health and mind and our natural surrounding which leads to proper balance.

In this context, a famous American scientist Michio Kaku (1947-) views beautifully in his Future of Mind on the ultimate progress of science and our destiny. He quotes lines from an article of Bill Joy published in Wired magazine with the provocative title "The Future Does Not Need Us". As he says:

Our most powerful 21st century technologies—robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotech—are threatening to make humans an endangered species." That incendiary article questioned the very morality of hundreds of dedicated scientists toiling in their labs on the cutting edge of science. He challenged the very core of their research, stating that the benefits of these technologies were vastly overshadowed by the enormous threats they posed to humanity. (Conclusion, Future of Mind)

He supports his views that:

... a macabre dystopia in which all our technologies conspire to destroy civilization.

Three of our key creations will eventually turn on us, he warned: One day, bioengineered germs may escape from the laboratory and wreak havoc on the world. Since you cannot recapture these life-forms, they might proliferate wildly and unleash a fatal plague on the planet worse than those of the Middle Ages. (Conclusion, Future of Mind)

He adds to this saying that:

"Biotechnology may even alter human evolution, creating "several separate and unequal species ... that would threaten the notion of equality that is the very cornerstone of our democracy." One day, nanobots may go berserk and spew out unlimited quantities of "gray goo," which will blanket Earth, smothering all life. Since these nanobots "digest" ordinary matter and create new forms of matter, malfunctioning nanobots could run amok and digest much of Earth. "Gray goo would surely be a depressing ending to our human adventure on Earth, far worse than mere fire or ice, and one that could stem from a simple laboratory accident. Oops," he wrote, "One day, the robots will take over and replace humanity. They will become so intelligent that they will simply push humanity aside. We will be left as an evolutionary footnote. "The robots would in no sense be our children.... On this pathour



humanity may well be lost," he wrote. Joy claimed that the dangers unleashed by these three technologies dwarfed the dangers posed by the atomic bomb in the 1940s. Back then, Einstein warned of the power of nuclear technology to destroy civilization: "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity." (Conclusion, Future of Mind)

Now the question is should we go ahead with the increasing updating knowledge of such machines technologies and put the consumers into the track of a series of competitions or think critically and seriously to have a thorough scrutiny of this and creatively and intentionally restraint from all these as we do for all other harmful things.

Glowing religious concerns

In this regard, the powerful lines of the sacred texts cannot be ignored. In general, The Bible, The Gita, The Quran and morals of many other religions speak of a couple things very simply. Firstly, they advocate that there is a creator of this creation to whom we should be thankful for everything and take him as the witness to all our deeds. Secondly, it should be our prime responsibility is to take care of this beautiful creation that is full of resources and suffice all our needs for generations together. It can provide us food, shelter and more importantly a healthy and best mind. Thirdly, we must not discriminate or put anybody into trouble willingly; torture others for personal pleasure or benefit or take away his/her means of survival forcibly. Fourthly, we should be kind enough to all the living beings; never to be greedy; and always lead a non-violent and peaceful life which is devoid of hatred, enmity and all other adverse conditions.

We already know that we will be judged according to our deeds on the earth. This is the version of The Bible, The Quran and The Gita. That means now the question arises to distinguish between the types of work we should do and should not do. In my opinion, maybe we are unable to resolute enough this problem of choice so far. That is we are yet to decide on whether we should go with the rat race of consumerism across the world intricately associated with continuously updated illusion of material science in order to create "our world" within the world created for us or we should better be caretakers of the beautiful and mysterious creation of the creator—the plants, trees, flowers, fruits, culture, tradition, fellow-feeling, mutual cooperation, and a lot many things with which the human civilization was established and bind us together as such.

Opinions of the famous litterateurs

The famous literary hands have mediated profoundly on the goings on of the human society and repeatedly warned us to be natural, deeply humanitarian, and foresee the consequences of our deeds from now. Let me quote T.S. Eliot in this context as he says: "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." (T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets)

Again, to quote Eliot's *The Hollow Men* which reflect ironically on the very sense of the existence of the modern human being. He attacks on the very essence of the resultant form of our achievements:

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar
Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

If this is our state then should we wait for more of chaos to come or be up and doing to think deeply and work rapidly to live simple and natural life; take care of the natural surrounding and shape one world community.

W.B. Yeats has also spoken of it very sharply regarding the dichotomy of being of us as he finds that we have been disintegrated and going away from both nature internal and nature external. He says:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,



The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. (W.B. Yeats's "Second Coming")

I think I need not explain these well-known lines because they are self-explanatory and popularly understood as warning for the humanity.

There is yet another authentic source to learn about the consequences of chaos. In the Mahabharat, there is burning instance which say about the utter destruction of the powerful Yaduvansha. Fuelled by their power, pride and arrogance, Lord Krishna's sons and other princes who were the potential Yadavas got perished while experimenting with evil; luxury and comfort; and illusory life of sensual pleasure which led them to getting locked in war to satisfy their royal ego. Thus, the sum and substance of The Gita is based on the type of karma and its consequences come out very precisely like mathematical calculations i.e., as you sow, so shall you reap.

Philosophical considerations

In addition to the scientific and religious views, social thinkers and philosophers very often say that it is the problem of choice. We are in a situation because (maybe hopeful or hopeless) we have chosen to be like this, maybe we are impudent to truth and nature imprudently. Some others also say that we may have made mistakes but repeating mistake brings failure and suffering. So, maybe we have been repeating our mistakes in the matter of bettering our future. Yet a third category is determined to face the destiny. Another positive school of thinkers are of the opinion that life is synonymous with problems and only death brings an end to this. If it is so, then we must be well-prepared to face the hazards of life. Very often, we may need to brood over, analyse and introspect as intelligent beings and citizens of the world about our progression of thoughts and actions. And this should be our recurrent notion of being citizens of a technological world. Some talk of evaluating the degree of rationality and irrationality of our thoughts and actions too. Referring to his statistical presentation of data regarding human achievement so far Nick Bostrom says:

...technological civilization will oscillate continuously within a relatively narrow band of development. If there is any chance that a cycle will either break through to the post-human level or plummet into extinction, then there is for each period a chance that the oscillation will end. Unless the chance of such a breakout converges to zero at a sufficiently rapid rate, then with probability one the pattern will eventually be broken. At that point the pattern might degenerate into one of the other ones we have considered." ("The Future of Humanity")

So, it is our dire responsibility to maintain a natural balance with mutual trust and belongingness.

In this context, let me put a couple of questions suspiciously. Firstly, in such a technologically advanced world, are we acting in disguise as the intellectual terrorists or live life as very healthy human with perfection of mind? Why are we unable to gauge the expectations of the creator and the creation? Are we greedy enough to dream of our survival at the cost of exhausting natural resources? Or it is a slow process of death, destruction and decay of the creation that is accepted simply? Or are we puppets in the hand of the unseen power? Additionally, are we getting stirred with the questions of power struggle or intellectual property or terrorism of fundamentalists and religious hatred or something else? Or is it a process of propagating to bring an end to human knowledge? Many things that we have done have a negative impact. For example, we made water reservoirs in a place but that resulted in formation of sedimentation and loss of both aquatic and terrestrial habitats of that locality. Also, it resulted in deprivation of a category of people and benefitted another. But the group that gets benefit throws vulnerability to the climate differently. The industrial and urban set ups have done this so far with water. God's plan must not be like this.

He has clearly spoken of the hopelessness of consequences of consumerism of mass production and material illusion.

It would be worthwhile to say here that there are ample opportunities and visions relating to the technology which does not mean that we will go on risking to achieving all and motivating the mass to go by this notion material production and consumption. If we keep in mind to live a simple, peaceful, healthy and natural life, then time has come to reject many components of the so-called materialistic life and most of the technological inventions. This is creating lots of intellectual terrorists, masters, workers and consumers without their idea that they are misusing their knowledge and valuable energy. Manual labour along with a healthy and agrarian life admixed with nurturing God's creation and living a simple life is a welcome step.

Conclusion

E.F. Schumacher's concluding remark in his Small is Beautiful is worthwhile here as he says:

In the excitement over the unfolding of his scientific and technical powers, modern man has built a system of production that ravishes nature and a type of society that mutilates man. If only there were more and more wealth, everything else, it is thought, would fall into



place. Money is considered to be all-powerful; if it could not actually buy non-material values, such as justice, harmony, beauty or even health, it could circumvent the need for them or compensate for their loss. The development of production and the acquisition of wealth have thus become the highest goals of the modern world in relation to which all other goals, no matter how much lip-service may still be paid to them, have come to take second place. (Epilogue, *Small is Beautiful*)

So far as I know, for any human disaster, it is not going to affect any other living beings such as whale or tiger or cuckoo because they go by nature. Rather for them, human activities are a threat to their existence. So, it is purely human concern. If we perish, the rest of the living things of the world will flourish. Some people say that there is yet another possibility that we will migrate to another planet. But does humanity have a future beyond the Earth? And can we guarantee that we will carry our habits and nature to such new places? Unravelling the mysteries of the earth and other planets is not bad but that pursuit should simultaneously guarantee the best and the longest plan of the living nature with all its elements and potentials. We should not urbanize and industrialize ourselves at the cost of shortage of water, oxygen and harmless sunlight. Our progression should not bring us different formless fears and our children should be quite hopeful for a better livelihood.

We have already utilised our genuine knowledge or sometimes pirated, copied, manipulated, de-structured and restructured knowledge for many a business-deals among ourselves. Now, time has come to go beyond the thought of loss and profit; the powerful and the weak. All our knowledge should be devoted to better the world community as well as nature all around. It seems no country or community can be proved stronger or get higher provision from the Creator. It seems apparently that enough of power, advanced technology, massive construction and huge amount of wealth and money can never bring us peace, tranquillity, unity and purity of spirit. Here, I would like to share something relevant paraphrasing the immortal lines from "Parbati" by a famous Odia poet Radhanath Roy (1848-1908):

By virtue of so-called knowledge, wealth and power, some people wish firmly to hold the clutch of destiny of all on the earth, but they forget that the clutch of their own destiny lies in the hand of the unseen and inevitable eternal force, the Creator. (p.120 "Parbati")

References

1. Bostrom, Nick. "The Future of Humanity," Future of Humanity Institute, Faculty of Philosophy & James Martin 21st Century School, Oxford University, <https://www.nickbostrom.com/papers/future.html>, www.nickbostrom.com
2. Eliot, T.S. *Hollow Men*, <https://allpoetry.com>
3. Eliot, T.S. *Four Quartets*, <https://allpoetry.com>
4. Hawking, Stephen. "The Future of the Universe," *Engineering & Science/Fall1991*, pp.15-21.
5. www.calteches.library.caltech.edu.pdf
6. Kaku, Michio.(2014). *The Future of the Mind*, Doubleday: London.
7. Roy, Radhanath (1962). "Parbati", Radhanath Granthabali, Cuttack: Cuttack Trading Company.
8. Schumacher, E.F. *Small is Beautiful*, Free PDF Downloaded from internet
9. Yeats, W.B. "Second Coming," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org>