

IT: The revolution without a paradigm shift

S.S. Gill's fascinating and timely book tells us that the information revolution has not benefited everyone

S.S. GILL is neither a technologist nor a journalist. He was a senior bureaucrat known for pioneering initiatives. But in this fascinating and timely book, he analyses the complex information scenario from a public policy perspective as well as a larger context. His book summarises insights from several US studies on the impact of new communication technologies. The first part of the book tries "to demystify the basic concepts of the IT" and their applications. The second analyses various aspects of impact of the IT on socio-economic and political paradigms at macro and micro levels. The third part describes Indian Scene in the context of government, business and people. The fourth is an overview of critical trends that concern us.

There is not much analysis of Indian experience. Hardly 45 pages are devoted to this. If we need to guard against the double-edged character of IT and communication media, we need critical appraisal of practices and policies. Gill's book should serve as an inspiration in this regard. This book should help India out of a passive outlook and a temporal view. Although the book is meant for the lay-person, it has much value to specialists, those engaged in policy decisions, teachers and students across disciplines, and to our political leaders.

If the information revolution is not helping reduce the divides between countries, and within countries for empowering and enriching people, the cumulative developments cannot be described as "revolutionary". The book reminds us that the revolutionary changes resulting from IT have not lead to a "power shift" as did the industrial revolution. On the contrary; the paradigm shift has strengthened the "existing power structure and production relations".

How, by using IT, can we minimise centralisation and maximise decentralisation or expand access to information and decision making instead of increasing control of a minority few, and promote respect for plurality; ensure equity concerns and increase the scope of democracy without compromising the stature of individual are other the issues dealt. That advertising supports and sustains newspapers, radio and TV has serious implications for such an endeavours. Gill explains the claim that IT creates more jobs than what it is replacing is not true. In fact, information- economy has eliminated many more jobs than it has created with "mantras of down sizing, right sizing and re-engineering". Gill also questions the claim that computers equalise learning opportunities between the rich and the poor. He argues "culture is being reduced to goods and services, and democracy to freedom of choice in the supermarket". That the Information Revolution has succeeded in vanquishing most competing ideologies, without generating countervailing forces and reform movements, is something the world needs to note.

Gill's book reminds us that the more the media expand, the less we seem to understand; the more the information flow, the less we really seem to know; the more the change, the more the same people get advantaged; the more the proliferation of technologies, the more the centralisation and control.