

Book Reviews

Book Review -I

Malhotra, R. (2021). *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Power*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, Reviewed by Arun Teja Polcumpally*

There is a good number of books dwelling on the impact of AI. Not many books are written on the concept of power. Rajiv Malhotra has eloquently written his insights into how AI would change the social fabric which in turn revolutionizes the understanding of the term *power*. At the onset, this book is meant for general reading and not specifically designed for the social science experts of technology scientists. Accordingly, this work should not be compared with the works of Nick Bostrom, Andrew NG, or Kai-Fu Lee. This book is structured on the five battlegrounds which are not to be confused with the geopolitical tussles. They represent the Economy and Jobs; Psychology; Global Power, Metaphysics, and India's future. This book appears to have emerged from the authors own philosophical debate between constructivism and material determinism. The author does not explicitly bring the western Science, Technology, and Society (STS) scholarship but builds his constructivism on Indian traditional knowledge systems. Books like Mahabharata, Gita and scholars like Sant Ramdas, Tukaram were frequently quoted. He espouses that the development and deployment of AI must be in congruence with the Indian traditional knowledge. This reminds the new book of Indian External Affairs Minister, Subramanian Jaishankar, in his book also has a similar take when it comes to the designing of foreign policy (Jaishankar, 2020, p. 112).

While this is the base on which the author builds his entire work, the readability of the book is quite efficient. The introduction provides a summary of all the chapters providing a reader with a good glimpse of the book. Each chapter has highlights mentioned at the start telling the reader what she could expect from the chapter. This layout of the book makes the reading comfortable. This review follows a theme wise analysis of the author's arguments.

Overview of AI technologies

In defining machine learning and big data, the author has taken a more practical approach to explain. A non – technical reader will find it easy. While getting onto a philosophical discussion on consciousness vs intelligence, he explains pretty well why AI systems can have human intelligence but not consciousness. While ascribing the status of an intelligent being to an AI system, it is convincingly put that it does not have a self-hood (Malhotra, 2021, p. 26). After the discussion on how AI does not have consciousness, it would have been better if the legal personhood status is also discussed. Such discussion would bring out the probable changes going to occur in the judicial power. The author's claim to AI not having consciousness contradicts Harari's claim that human beings are algorithms (Harari N. Y., 2017, p. 97). Both are correct in their paradigms.

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Agency is being shared with AI Systems.

The author considers that AI developers take a reductionist approach in understanding human consciousness (Malhotra, 2021, p. 219). Accordingly, such a reductionist approach would make the society materialistic and brushes away the spiritual paradigm. I would call this objectification of society over subjectification. A socially constructed world is subjective but ubiquitous AI would make it more objective. With the advent of AI, material determinism might take over the conscious decision making of humans, thus giving up the agency. Calling it *cobots*, the author opines that the transfer of agency from a human to a robot would be done gradually culminating in the complete transfer. This is similar to the explanation of Latour in his examples of Seat Belt and Door Keeper (Latour, 1992). Such agency transfer, according to the author is done in an accelerating manner. Such fast-paced AI disruption will advise scholars to think beyond the *Luddite fallacy* and prepare for the anthropomorphic future.

The author is convinced that the next decade is ushered by the electronic fueled by AI systems (Malhotra, 2021, p. 23). However, Future of Life Institute, a non—profit organization working on the societal impacts of technology opines that there is no consensus on when AI would become ubiquitous or achieve the level of general intelligence (Future of Life Institute, n.d.). Even Nick Bostrom, author of the famous book, *Superintelligence* opines that AI can achieve human-level machine intelligence by mid-century but not any sooner (Bostrom, 2017, p. 25). Going by these opinions, Rajiv Malhotra’s opinion of the next decade being ushered by AI systems must be carefully read. It does not mean achieving any general intelligence or superintelligence, but a peripheral level adaptation of AI in every aspect of life.

Data Rights

“Anonymization is an exercise in futility (Malhotra, 2021, p. 60)”

Current debates on data protection are opined to be a futile attempt to protect personal data. Digital firms engaging in anonymizing personal data suffices the concept of privacy protection on an individual according to the current laws. Author argument on this aspect quite convincingly. Data can be numbered instead of mapping them to some names, the data. Data sets such as obtained can be used for any purpose and successfully exploits the behaviour data points of an individual. They can at least identify the behavioural attributes of a region, society, and any small groups. While the book does not mention that a family can also be considered as a group, numeral coding of the personal data can be grouped as families while still protecting the identity from the auditors. I concur with the author on making the data an intellectual property of an individual. Such protected data would require the permission of the user every time a firm uses it.

Expanding the discussion on data rights to the global level, the author brings in the concept of data capitalism. It is a phenomenon in which private firms try to control the world market by collecting the data. As the platform companies have grown exponentially in value and influence, it has become difficult for the new players to

emerge in their field of business. Factors such as capital, first-mover advantage in the data acquisition, possessing already trained models, user investment in the platforms, acquisitions, vertical integration make the new entries difficult (Malhotra, 2021, p. 76). New players neither will have enough data to understand the market nor the capital to invest in cutting edge technologies.

AI generates new haves and have-nots

An extension to the impact of AI on socio-economic conditions is the division of the entire population into haves and have-nots. The author backs this argument by quoting various reports and scholarly works. However, I disagree when the author says that AI automation of industry would throw many off their jobs. Such condition is opined to reduce the spending capacity of the market-leading to demand constrained conditions (Malhotra, 2021, p. 95). He also mentions other factors like the growth of the elderly population, disengagement of women in some service sectors, large swatches of obsolete workers (not equipped to work alongside AI). This, I considered being a biased analysis. If AI becomes ubiquitous in the industry, the types of jobs which would emerge would be human interactors, hangouters, explorer companions, etc. Today, these are not considered jobs. The author recognizes such jobs in the future but says they do not add up to the jobs lost (Malhotra, 2021, p. 100).

Global Power Change

“Modern civilization will hopefully survive and become stronger, but it will certainly become radically transformed in the process.” (Malhotra, 2021, p. 102)

When Harari said that "humankind has lost its faith in the liberal story that dominate the world politics in recent decades" because of the merger of biotechnology and information technology (Harari Y. N., 2019, p. 9), I thought the rise of AI would take away the agency from humans. Such development would put a curtain on the traditional geopolitics as the war and frictions of the nation-states (of course in a century). Rajiv Malhotra reiterated the same concern but in a different manner. The loss of faith in liberalism appears to be covered by China's totalitarian system. Its export of sovereign cyberspace can be thought of as an initial warning.

“Artificial Intelligence is to China’s twenty-first century rise to the power what the industrial revolution was to Britain’s ascendance on the late 1700s.” (Malhotra, 2021, p. 107)

China historically has been a regional hegemon. After the opium wars, it has lost its dominance and got subdued by the colonial powers. Maybe with this hindsight, the author claims that China has learnt to build its empire to dominate the world and not the region to not repeat its mistakes.

India and its laidback attitude

“If data represents national wealth, India is for sale.” (Malhotra, 2021, p. 119)

“The decision by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, to invite foreign organizations to capture big data on the Kumbh Mela has been one of the biggest blunders and sellout of India’s data assets.” (Malhotra, 2021, p. 302)

Despite India's effort in preparing a data protection bill, it has not been able to pass legislation. Recently on February 25, the Ministry of Information Technology has passed a gazette notification titled "released Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code." It must be appreciated as it mandates private companies to put up grievance mechanisms, and content regulations. But it is not bothered about the data outflows. As the author puts it in the phrase above, India is indeed put for sale. India is always meddled up with ad hoc legislations, silly political debates between the parties, communal narratives. China, on the other hand, has meticulously supervised its strategy of becoming a great power. It started with the consolidation of political power, educating its citizens, getting the most advanced skill into the country by all means, and structurally combining these developments with the correct anticipatory policies regarding technological development (Malhotra, 2021, p. 122). The author quite efficiently and eloquently argues that China is rising above the US in AI development and research.

It is opined that India lags decades behind other nations like the US and China. NITI Aayog's 2018 discussion paper is considered to have a rudimentary and elementary level of analysis of AI impact on society (Malhotra, 2021, p. 267). I agree with this argument that NITI Aayog's 115-page document provides nothing but a list of wishes (Polcumpally, 2020). The author gives a detailed explanation of why India is vulnerable with its overpopulated, under-educated and low R&D in the field of AI. Further, it is opined that India is over-dependent on foreign technologies (Malhotra, 2021, p. 276). The author opines that India has sidelined its traditional knowledge and quickly adopted western knowledge systems. Instead of accepting foreign knowledge, it is opined to integrated western modernization with Indian traditions. But, the author misses the point that traditions are constructed on the bygone knowledge systems.

The author's criticism of educational institutions using foreign platforms and giving up the data is unwarranted. They use foreign platforms and software because; firstly there are no indigenously developed softwares which are as efficient as the foreign ones. Secondly, there are no regulations on the operations of foreign softwares and intellectual property rights on the indigenous data. Further, his detailed listing of why Facebook is happy to get access to India's market provides a warning on how foreign companies could psychologically colonize India (Malhotra, 2021, p. 312) (Malhotra, 2021, p. 318). An interesting comparison has been made to the pre-colonial era. Those were the times when regional powers used the forces of the French, British, and Dutch to tackle other regional powers (Malhotra, 2021, p. 320). Today, it is the same, but not with military assistance but with capital investments and technology.

"US congressmen have held hearings in which they have accused Google of stealing the data of Americans...Australian and EU governments are cracking down against the US tech giants. But Indians feel proud ... and unconcerned about the subordinate place it is being assigned." (Malhotra, 2021, p. 322)

Having established that India is held back a decade in the advancement of AI, its education is opined to cater to provide modern slaves for the foreign companies. The author severely and correctly points out the Indian establishment's attitude to selling their labour at whatever price to tackle its increasing unemployment (Malhotra, 2021,

p. 289). While this is a structural problem with India, current policies regarding employment are also opined to exacerbate unemployment when AI looms large.

AI implication on social sciences

An interesting application of AI mentioned in the book is *social sciences* (Malhotra, 2021, p. 39). While I read a lot on the impact of AI, I seldom come across literature asking social sciences to adopt AI systems. I strongly agree with this opinion and believe that all social sciences should dwell more on philosophical discussions rather than just the collection of data and putting them into theoretical models. The entire discipline of social science will undergo a revolution in its practices. With the approaches like humanism being discarded, social science methods like social constructivism, disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and political science will become obsolete in their present form.

The author opines that instead of the western sociology paradigm, Indian social science researchers could adopt the Vedic concept of Purushartha. It provides for four pursuits of life viz. Artha, Kama, Dharma, Moksha. All this education system, youth's thought processes are all based on the borrowed western knowledge is a path towards an aesthetic life. Even in ancient India, the common man would not have learnt all this. Severe criticism of western sociology and its scientific methods is a bit extreme. Even with western knowledge or even epistemology, Indian societies can be shaped in accordance with the modern era.

Conclusion

This book provides a way to exclude all the material available on the open internet. It provides sufficient information on the impact of AI on society, state and global politics. Though it does not cover AI breakthroughs, it is a good amalgamation of concerns regarding AI.

Concepts like data capitalism, dumbing down of the Indian society, humans losing agency, China and US tussle, global economic inequality, objectification of the society, changes in the discipline of social sciences and Indian government's unwanted attitude regarding the data and technology policy are some of the major aspects to look forward in this book.

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