



**Reclaiming the Soul: Deconstructing Dehumanisation in the Digital Era
through Vajpayee's Verse**

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Abstract:

With the rapid advancement of science, Artificial Intelligence technologies have exhibited capabilities that surpass human abilities across multiple domains. Furthermore, this progression is not merely technical. AI poses significant challenges to humanism, a philosophy emphasising individual experiences, freedom, and intrinsic human values. As we combat these challenges, Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee's poetry comes across as a possible roadmap. His readers and critics describe his poetry as a reflection of his deep humanism, which blended his political life with his compassionate nature. His verses transcend mere political rhetoric, foregrounding universal values, social responsibility, and the human condition. As he utters, "Never accord me that height / That I cannot embrace strangers," we are strongly reminded of the need to prioritise human beings despite our outstanding achievements. This paper intends to bring out Vajpayee's inclusive humanism embedded in his poetical output, where we find the potential antidote to the multiple concerns related to humanity belonging to this digital era.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, challenges, humanism, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's poetry, potential antidote.

Introduction

The world is now a new one, livid with the boom of technological progress. We witness the expansion of digital strategies everywhere. Moreover, herein lies the biggest question: are we serving human beings properly? Are human beings being treated humanely? In India, we have the concept of 'Integral Humanism' propagated by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya. This is essentially about the importance of human beings over all other things. Now, in this age of Artificial Intelligence, there is growing concern that humanity will be compromised and profit will take centre stage. This issue needs to be addressed. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916-1968) was a profound thinker and social worker whose most significant contribution to the Indian political and social system is his concept of 'Integral Humanism'. Known as 'Ekatma Manavvad' in Hindi, the ideology serves as an Indian alternative to other Western concepts like capitalism and communism. According to this concept, there are four objectives of human life. These are Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. Dharma is the regulating moral principle which guides all other actions, including the means of earning wealth, Artha. Kama and Moksha are human aspirations and spiritual goals, respectively. Pandit Upadhyaya maintains that a human being is not an economic animal but a conscious, vigilant creature in whom the four attributes, namely body, mind, intellect, and soul, work together in perfect harmony. He points out that we are all a part of 'Virat', the cosmic. As he places humanism at the forefront, we are made aware of the present digital world, which is making rapid strides towards technological overpowering. We need to see if this advancement is in sync with the betterment of the human race.

Integral Humanism: The Philosophical Foundation

The unprecedented advancement of Artificial Intelligence poses a fundamental ontological threat to these humanist values. Scholars identify several dehumanising vectors. The

scientific leap, especially the world created by Artificial Intelligence, tends to ignore the holistic part of development. The core factor, 'Dharma', is being bypassed for the sake of making a profit. Instead of empathy and thinking for the poorest of the poor, AI has been focusing on the privileged section and heading towards a mechanical world. The poetry of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in this tension between the mechanical and the spontaneously human, can serve as a roadmap. He is a statesman-poet, a man who used verse to reclaim humanism from the clutches of the mechanical quagmire. His poetry, such as in the collection *Merī Ikyāvāna Kavitaēm*, speaks about vulnerability, empathy, and the persistence of the human spirit in the face of adversity. He highlights the 'inner man', a notion which is very much like Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay's synthesis of body, mind, intellect, and soul. Vajpayee's work provides an emotional and ethical counterweight to the cold efficiency of present-day technology. The aesthetic and spiritual essence found in Vajpayee's reflections on struggle and hope is an antidote to the logic-driven and algorithm-centric AI.

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya advocated his concept of 'Integral Humanism' in 1965. As we trace the origin of his theory, we find that it is deeply rooted in the non-dualistic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. His theory highlights the oneness of all living souls or creatures—whether human, animal, or plant. All human beings are the same and are an inseparable part of a single organic whole. The cornerstone of Upadhyaya's concept of 'Integral Humanism' is the human being. While promoting this supremacy of humanism, he does not reject Western thoughts. He examines each of the premises on its merit. He criticises when he notices flaws or shortcomings in them. He finds most of the Western theories unfit or not suitable for the Indian psyche. Integral Humanism stresses the organic relationship between an individual and the society he or she belongs to. A personal goal should not create a conflict of interest with the broader social

goal. Sometimes, an individual must sacrifice for the greater society. The promotion of indigenous culture is central to his concept. No model sans the essence of Indian culture and ethos is good enough. In promoting this, he does not rule out some differences and disagreements. He accepts those and speaks about the role of interdependence and unity. Thus, we can create a 'Dharma Rajya', where every citizen would have both power and obligations to the nation. In this ideal state, even the poorest of the poor would be benefitted. This is 'Antodaya'. Inclusive welfare is the middle name of 'Integral Humanism'. In this age of consumerism and indiscriminate industrialisation, there is a risk that the grass-root people may not reap the fruits of development. In that scenario, there would not be social equality. Upadhyaya opposes social inequality and highlights the role of the family unit. As we envisage the modern goal of sustainable development, the concept of 'Integral Humanism' appears to be relevant and decisive in this age. It serves as an alternative model in which social, political, and economic issues are addressed.

The Dehumanising Vectors of the Digital Era

As we discuss the present technological boom, certain hazards are looming large. These may affect the future of humanity and democratic governance. Many scholars and experts are now voicing concerns about the alarms of this new technological era. The basic tenets of classical humanism are now threatened, and this is a major concern. Even the primary anxieties are frightening enough. There is an unfiltered barrage of data and a proliferation of unregulated algorithms. We have porous cybersecurity and less involvement of the human mind due to the growing influence of AI. Furthermore, only a few are controlling the power of technology. Human beings are now reduced to mere consumers. Digital footprints are followed without enough human touch. So, there is a challenge before us. We must establish a New Digital

Humanism. We must prioritise human dignity over the incessant surge of robotisation and AI. The inaugural Esade Digital Humanism Forum, directed by José Maria Lassalle, zeroed in on these vital needs. The forum felt that the digital revolution is here to stay, and there is visible potential for socio-economic development. There are negative externalities which need to be removed. Carme Artigas, Spain's Secretary of State for AI, in her keynote address, put forward the importance of Europe leading the movement toward digital sovereignty. Citizens must be empowered to control data and technical access. The Government of Spain, to ensure this, has invested €72 billion in the digital sector. Industry leaders like John Hoffman reiterated that without ethical leadership, the potential of serving the populace through technology would be jeopardised. Over the last few years, tech entities have been gaining more and more power. Compared to them, democratic institutions are getting weaker. This imbalance is likely to disturb political stability.

We now witness disinformation or distortion getting viral on social media. AI-generated algorithms are spread everywhere. In this situation, the ground of possible dehumanisation becomes fertile. Noted personality Victoria Camps blames social media platforms like X, which encourage obscene contents. If there is no shift now toward reclaiming connection and dialogue, the freedom of people will be compromised. José Maria Lassalle quoted the wise words of Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things." This maxim is paramount, and all social media platforms must uphold this. Unfortunately, this is not being followed. Geoffrey Hinton is a father figure in deep learning, and he has warned about the evils of the uncontrolled and reckless use of AI. He relinquished his job at Google. Having seen the capitalist motive of the business houses, he believes that the companies are intent on making profits only. The present system will give rise to large-scale unemployment, and only a section of society will reap the benefit of AI.

Opportunities for fresh graduates are already shrinking. According to Hinton, only the healthcare sector will remain unhindered since AI is likely to increase the efficiency of doctors. However, he also warns us about the extinction of humankind due to the uncontrollable and ill use of AI. Artificial Intelligence has tremendous potential, no doubt, but there are enough dangers. So, in the days to come, AI use may lead to ultimate good or ultimate bad. How can we ascertain only the benefit in this possible erosion of humanism?

Vajpayee's Verse: A Poetic Roadmap

The probable answer lies in the writings of the poet-politician, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. His writings and perspective towards life have much in common with the late thinker Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya. Both of them are essentially humanistic, and both of them follow a similar political path as well. Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1924-2018) was an Indian poet, writer, and statesman who served as the Prime Minister of India thrice. An accomplished Hindi poet and writer, Vajpayee often penned verses of profound sympathy, 'Samvedna' (feeling to understand others' pain and suffering). *Merī Ikyāvāna Kavitaēm* is one of Vajpayee's important works. Translated into English as *My 51 Poems*, this book showcases Vajpayee's deep love and sympathy for India and her people, his genuine concern for humanity, and his observations on human nature. His poetic style is deceptively simple and easy-going. However, the poems convey profound thoughts. Another noteworthy collection of poems, *Amar Aag Hai* (The Eternal Fire), shows the endearing poet's indomitable spirit and unwavering commitment to the country. *Nayi Chunauti Naya Awasar* (New Challenge, New Opportunity) is a testament to Vajpayee's vision for his country and his countrymen. In the poems of this book, he discusses at length the challenges that his country, India, faced in the 20th and 21st centuries. There are some remarkable poems in this book which provide a roadmap for the future. In order to combat the

challenges of the present digital world, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's humanistic poems clearly provide potent solutions. His poems do not speak against technology but favour the use of technology for the betterment of greater humanity. He laments the fact that whereas machines are becoming more and more intelligent, humans are becoming more mechanical. At this pace, the digital era will turn people into data points.

His poems remind us that a computer cannot feel 'Samvedna'—the ability to empathise. He cautions us that we may be connected by wires and wireless processes, but we still may be disconnected from each other. He argues that moving faster does not necessarily mean moving ahead. The digital world denotes pace, and in that frenzy, we do not devote time to our inner self. Vajpayee reminds us through his poems that real progress is marked by peace, not by the speed of signals emanating from machines. A major setback of this modern age is isolation. Atal Bihari Vajpayee often expresses his angst over this curse. In spite of being surrounded by the noise of the world, an individual feels alone. There is no cure for this inner loneliness. Therefore, Vajpayee puts forward the idea of 'Goshthi' (a structured and meaningful body of people) in which all the members of the group stay together and share life meaningfully. In his popular book of poems, *Merī Ikyāvāna Kavītāem*, there are some very special verses which denounce a materialistic or mechanical state. For instance, "Kadam Milakar Chalna Hoga" (We must walk together) seems to be a clarion call for national unity, but it is basically a call for humanism. In the world of gadgets and wireless machines, collective presence is needed. Another poem, "Apne Hi Man Se Kuch Bolein" (Let us speak to our own minds), is directly addressed to all the people lost in the distractions and noise of the digital world, inviting them for self-analysis. Vajpayee's poetry is suggestive and evocative. He suggests that the digital universe is a mask, and we must

be careful to recognise the real face behind the mask. He reminds us repeatedly that connectivity is not connection and information is not wisdom.

Hindi Verses and Translations

As we quote some lines from his poem:

Hindi:

"Prithvi par itna shor kyun hai?

Yantra jaag raha hai, man so raha hai.

Humne bhid toh ikatthi kar li,

Magar har vyakti akela ro raha hai."

English Translation:

"Why is there so much noise upon this earth?

The machine is waking up, while the mind goes to sleep.

We have gathered vast crowds around us,

Yet, every individual weeps alone."

We find that he is awake to the danger of all-pervading machines, the curse of the digital trap. 'Why is there so much noise?' The 'noise' here suggests the ceaseless sound of constant notifications and signals. This distraction does not let us think of ourselves; we are not allowed to introspect. This is a loss for humanism. 'The machine is waking up' is a strong reminder that the digital grip is getting stronger and is about to engulf everything. 'While the mind goes to sleep' refers to the inertness of the mind. We are being guided only by the command of the digital world, the AI. His next line, 'We have gathered vast crowds around us,' refers to the

countless followers of AI, the machine-God. Nevertheless, he observes, 'every individual weeps alone', which is a sad commentary on diminishing humanity.

The former PM-poet was never against the use of technology. Technology must not boss over people around. We, the people, must control the machines in a judicious, humane way. Soulless machines do not have the capacity to feel the plight of human beings. Having pursued the machines and the AI-dominated universe, one may reach the top of the world in terms of amassing wealth, pelf, and riches. However, without any care for the greater community, that self-centred individual will stay alone. He will die 'unwept, unhonoured and unsung'. In his poem "Pehchaan" (Identity), he brings home the point:

"Oonchai par woh milte hain,
Jo swayam ko bhool jaate hain.
Patthar ki murtiyon mein pran kahan?
Hum mitti ke insaan, mitti mein mil jaate hain."

Translation:

"On the heights, you only find those
Who have forgotten their true selves.
Where is the life in statues of stone (machines)?
We are humans of earth, and to the earth we must belong."

In "Geet Naya Gata Hoon" (I Sing a New Song), Atal Bihari Vajpayee voices the impending danger subtly:

"Prithvi ki karvat, itihās ka pahiya,
Rukta nahi hai, par insaan thak gaya hai.

Duniya badal rahi hai, magar kya man badla?
Saman toh badha, par insaan ghat gaya hai."

Translation:

"The earth turns, the wheel of history spins,
It does not stop, but man is exhausted.
The world is changing, but has the heart changed?
Materials have increased, but the Human has diminished."

Even though change is the only permanent thing in the world, some core things must remain unscathed. Humanity, sympathy for fellow citizens, and compassion for the distressed must not change. When humanity abandons these fundamental qualities, the doom nears home. With the continuous and overpowering dose of the digital world and AI invasion, 'man is exhausted'. Over the last few decades, there is no denying the fact that consumerism has increased, and people's comfort level has reached a new height. However, this hedonistic pleasure-seeking has been robbing us of our humanity. We are sadly reduced to machine-regulated creatures. Vajpayee strongly condemns this and invokes humanism.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence has given birth to astonishing speed, outstanding accuracy, and breath-taking imagination in the technologies which human beings cannot perform. However, all these superior capabilities are in mere technical spheres. AI poses a serious threat to fundamental humanism, which pivots around individual experience, freedom, and empathy. As we go on analysing these complexities, the poetry of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee comes as a fresh breath of hope and rejuvenation. His sensitive verses eloquently portray the elixir of humanism.

He is always profuse in delivering universal ethics, social commitment, and selfless duty, as we see in his immortal lines like "Mujhko manav mein bhed nahin, mera antasthal var vishal" (I do not discriminate against people, my inner heart is vast enough) or "Main ek bindu paripoorna sindhu hain yeh mera Hindu samaaj" (I am a singular drop in this vast ocean of society).

Atal Bihari Vajpayee's poetry is not merely the lyrical output of a sensitive soul; it is the outpouring of humanism. He always put humanity first. The present crisis felt in this digital world can be overcome if we minutely analyse his poems. We may make tremendous progress in science, but never should we think of profit and development alone. In any situation, the betterment of humanity should be the topmost priority. In his poem 'Identity', he declares the ultimate position of human beings:

Perched high on a tree / Man looks tall / Standing low at the roots / Man looks small.

Man is neither high / Man is neither small / Man is just man / The highest being of ALL.

As we understand and assimilate the elixir of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's poems moist with humanism, the world ahead of us becomes a lovely place to live in. His poetry becomes an extension of integral humanism. Then our thought explores how we can design systems that enhance, not replace, human judgment, dignity, and direction. It requires a shared commitment to collective action, to catalyse responsible AI progress. AI's impact spans all aspects of society and requires active participation from all in shaping the course, to co-create norms and systems that ensure AI serves humanity in all its diversity and individuality. We need a human intelligence shift. This is exactly the roadmap professed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

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