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Books Build Nations, Screen Distract Them

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iii. Enlightenment Era and American as well as French Revolutions are rooted in books.

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most powerful weapon."

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The Essay

Nations rise not with weapons, but with words inked in books. History has shown us that books are not just a means of communication but a powerful tool of ~~communicate~~ transformation.

It is said that civilizations flourished when they revered scholarships and crumble when they surrender to idle distractions. Books have been humanity's greatest teachers. They preserve history, share knowledge and spark imagination. Leaders from Quaid-e-Azam to Mandela were

shaped by books. Immersive and extensive reading creates the habit of empathy, discipline and the ability to reflect deeply. On the flipping hand, in the digital age, screens have replaced books and posing the danger of endless distraction. Without an iota of doubt, screens offer unprecedented flow of information, it also can be used for education, but it is often used for entertainment and social media, weakening attention and discouraging thriving. It is therefore a fact that books have historically built the intellectual, cultural and moral foundations of strong nations, whereas the abundance of screen time, particularly for entertainment, is diverting attention, reducing critical thinking and affecting social cohesion.

Book reading fosters critical

thinking and challenges stereotypical societies. It was the same quiet company of books that gave birth to the revolutions of past and shaken the empires and nations rebuilt. From the pen of philosophers, the 17th and 18th century marked the intellectual revolution in Europe known as Enlightenment. Thinkers such as John Locke, Montesquieu and J.J. Rousseau challenged the centuries unquestioned authority and proposed new models of government, rights and society. Moreover, Lockean ideas of liberty, life and property deeply influenced the American and later the French Revolution. In France, the philosophical works eventually through printed books and pamphlets, eroded legitimacy of absolutism. These ideas simply did not "inform French Revolution, they galvanized it." In this way, books

built nation by planting the seeds of citizenship, questioning authority and enabling governance based on reason and critical thinking rather than privilege.

Beyond politics, books preserve language, memory and cultural identity. Books give an oppressed nation a new platform from where the youth of a suppressed nation can become united. In the same token, in South Asia, it was Allama Iqbal, who with his poetry, galvanized the Muslims' of identity and helped paved the way for Pakistan. Moreover, his literary works ~~were~~ gave the spiritual emancipation that there is a light at the end of the tunnel for the muslims of South Asia. Additionally, they became a vital stakeholder when

they read, reflected and internalised Iqbal. The development of nations stand upon the habit of reading. According to George R.R. Martin,

A reader lives a thousand years lives before he dies.

The man who never reads lives only one."

The African writer Chinua Achebe in his book "things fall apart," gave the message of unity and nationalism that eventually became the stoning point for the movement against colonialism. Hence, the abovementioned examples loudly reveal the significance of books in one's life.

Apart from national identity and history, book promotes education and innovation that further helps in expanding critical thinking and capacity building. Moreover, the ideas of nationalism and nation building

has unearthed from books that additionally created the concept of harmony among nations. Most noteworthy, the developed countries rule the roost in every field of life due to books. The study of world economic forum states that the Finland exemplify, how a strong reading culture correlates with high educational outcomes and innovation. The education system of Finland is ranked among the best globally. They embed reading from early childhood, develop sustained attention and critical thinking. Books creates traits indispensable for a nation's ascent. When reading with purpose becomes common, the intellectual reservoir of a society expands, fueling scientific, artistic and economic progress.

Besides educational promotion and innovation, book reading inspired

ordinary people and shaped them into world leaders. From Quaid-e-Azam to Mandela, the notion that education is the most powerful weapon ~~beco~~ that can pioneer a social change becomes a remarkable testament. It was the power of books and critical thinking that made Plato, the father of western philosophy.

Furthermore, through his education and observations, Leonardo da Vinci gained the insight that became the idea central idea to his artistic work. Most notably in the portrait of Mona Lisa. One can witness that the path to nobility lies in books.

While many reformers used education to uplift nations, Prophet (PBUH) stand out as the most profound example, not just reforming a tribe or a country, but laying the foundation of a global civilization.

through the pursuit of knowledge. So, all these evidences prove one thing that books are the source of discipline, self introspection and change.

In the digital era, there is a flow of information that makes life incredibly easy. The screen offers an incredible access to everything. On the one hand, on the contrary, screen and digital device poses a fundamental challenge. While it is a source of connectivity, it presents the world as a global village, where one can explore new things, but on the flipping hand, it often reduces attention span and becomes the source of distractibility. Research shows that the excessive screentime erodes the capacity for deep reading and reflection. When citizens

are overloaded with information and unable to focus deeply, reading culture deeply suffers, attention to books drops and the foundation to knowledge building weaken. Thus, digital fatigue and cognitive fragmentation occurs.

Apart from digital fatigue, the screens nurture flow of information that further gives rise to misinformation and echo chambers. Moreover, the misinformation gives birth to disinformation and results in undermining democratic culture. In Pakistan and elsewhere, young people may be highly connected, yet poorly informed; thus, societies risk losing the habit of inquiry and debate that books once nurtured. The Digital Rights of Pakistan organization states that during the 2024 General Elections,

social media platforms in Pakistan were rife with disinformation, out of 700 posts, a significant thirty percent were gender disinformation and fifty percent were AI generated or manipulated to mislead voters.

Similarly, in the health sector, during the Covid-19, in Pakistan, disinformation campaigns exploited the crisis to undermine public trust in health agencies, as documented in the Humanitarian Initiative Study. In the same token, a fake news, in Lahore, resulted into violent protests between police and students. Thus, screens, when uncontrolled, distract nations from authenticity, reflection and nation building.

Despite social connectivity, the profound paradox of social isolation still persists. Ironically, the world today is "connected", yet, "disconnected".

According to a research of WHO:

"Increased depression is linked with excessive screen time".

The social connectivity is creating a sense of loneliness in the physical domain for older generation that further increasing the level of stress, anxiety and mental pressure. The youth of present day often jumbles in physical settings due to overuse of social media, and they often start lacking the skill of humour. There is a popular internet aphorism:

"The youth have five hundred online friends, but no one to share fires with."

A longitudinal study of adults aged fifty found that lacking meaningful offline ties, ^{causes} higher anxiety and deterioration in health condition.

Therefore, it is stated that mere technological connectivity cannot

substitute for genuine human interaction. Real connection involves walking alongside someone, sharing a glance and engaging in counterpart dialogue. As the youth increasingly warp-around screens mediated society, the risk of losing the capacity to form deep relational networks for resilience, empathy and cognitive health.

The way forward lies not in rejecting technology, but integrating it to enhance a reading culture through digital platforms. For instance: eBooks, reading apps and interactive texts can help to revive the book culture for a tech savvy generation.

In the same manner, in the school classrooms, through screens, multimedia learning should be integrated with classic reading style. Surely, it will help

the students of the present generation to understand and learn easily, to add up, it also does not distract the attention of students. The connection between a screen and a book will able students to consume the screens critically and shift between deep-reading and digital content. With the blending of both classical and modern methods, instead of distracting, screens will play a part in harnessing both books' foundational strength and screens reach.

Apart from blending books and technology, a vigorous awareness campaign is the need of the time. According to American Academy of Pediatrics;

"The modern youth waste five hours daily on screens". Thus,

here the role of parenting becomes pivotal. Instead of wasting time, the parents should divert their focus towards constructive things from screen such as: audiobooks, e-learning and eBooks. On the traditional method of learning, the schools should introduce learning through technology, multimedia, laptops and other gadgets. To provide a conducive learning environment, the government should invest in online libraries; thus, the screen should also become a source of learning. As Marshall McLuhan said:

“The medium is the message, what children consume and how they consume it, shapes their cognitive and emotional landscape”.

Hence, fostering a culture of media literacy at home and in classrooms

ensures that the power of books continues to build minds, while the distraction of screens are transformed into purposeful learning.

In conclusion, while the digital revolution has brought undeniable benefits in terms of accessibility and communication, its unregulated and excessive use has also created major challenges, especially for learning, focus, and meaningful human interaction. Screens, unless harnessed wisely, risk distracting societies and eroding the very capacity that nations require, in a world where global competition hinges on knowledge, creativity and civic engagement. Books on the other hand, remain timeless tools of intellectual and moral development. They promote critical thinking, imagination, empathy, and a deep engagement with ideas;

therefore, the revival of reading culture is not optional, it is essential.

Nations anchored in reading while innovating digitally will rise; those seduced by mere distraction will stagnate. If a country like Pakistan wishes to claim its promise, it must recognise the book remains mightier in nation building than the pixel.