BOOK REVIEW

Siva Vaidhyanathan: The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry). University of California Press: Berkeley, CA. March 2012, pp. 280, Rs. 1622.12 ($24.95), ISBN: 9780520272897

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Siva Vaidhyanathan as author of the book 'The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)' has done a brilliant and convincible job in substantiating that we bestow immense respect on Google. We believe Google acts for our growth but this deluded notion of ours is paving for an extension to a blind faith in Google and its powers. The praise bestowed on Google is misleading people to believe in Google blindly but other concerns which are related with the usage of Google are ignored by the Users.

Vaidhyanathan's book is very different from the previous books written on Google for it focuses on how we use Google and the book certainly isn't limited to Google's organizational structure. It elaborates how we have accepted Google and granted it a significant position in our lives. Google is not just a company for it is a Search Engine which adds to the knowledge of people from varied disciplines and different walks of life. In today's world the educated, skilled who are working and elite cannot escape the shadow of Google in their lives. Vaidhyanathan's book studies the relationship of Google with its billions of users. Google's policies and actions are taken into consideration. This book explores on highlighting the exaggeration which has been created regarding Google and the way it offers its services to the people. Vaidhyanathan explains how Google has permeated our culture and how it has become an inherent part of our lives and Vaidhyanathan named this permeation of Google as the Googlization. So, Google has made it easy for accessing information and everything is Googlized in today's date. Vaidhyanathan explains that Google and its products are indistinguishable from the Web. Most of the services which we use online — Gmail or YouTube or Browsers like Chrome all belong to Google. It is very difficult for an Internet User to escape from Google. Even though Google is playing good role in transforming the way information is handled but there is something mystical about its presence. Google can have repercussions for the users in the forthcoming years. Vaidhyanathan states that we need to examine both the consequences of the usage of Google and our response to it. We as the 'users' of Google have to realize that we are not Google's customers. Google is neither unvarying nor unambiguously upright for us in terms of its beneficence. It is dangerous because of our uncritical faith and dependence on it. It is dangerous because our whole life is structured around it and also because we can't survive without it. So, Google has for sure a significant role to play in public discourse and policy. In the contemporary era, it is inconceivable to envisage sustenance of a modern and well-connected life without the usage of Google. It has become a necessary–seemingly natural–part of our daily lives.

In the first chapter Vaidhyanathan urges the Google 'users' to keep a check on the extent to which they trust Google. We as Internet users get attracted to Google because most of its services are for free — that is, for no remuneration. But it would be wrong for us to believe that Google is working socially and selflessly. For sure transactions takes place between users and Google but then these transactions are nonmonetary in nature. Google tracks our movements on the web through the cookies which it stores by default in our web browsers. Google knows too much about us and yet we are unaware of its policies. Vaidhyanathan with his wise tidbits introduces us to the power of Google and its capability to influence public policy. In the People's Republic of China, the state
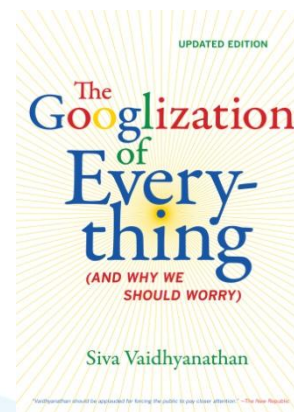
clearly runs the Web. In Russia, no one does. Though some states like Germany, France, Italy, and Brazil have found ways to curb Google's dominance. But still no single state, firm or institution in the world has as much power over Web-based activity as Google does. Google is ruling the Web like Caesar for this renowned web browser is charismatic in its appeal like Caesar. Google is not brutal and dictatorial as Caesar. We need not plot for its assassination as an end to Google may produce a chaos all over the web and this chaos would be similar to what Rome experienced after the Caesar's death. Google is a Web search-engine service which is more of a Web-based advertising company due to its structure of organizational set-up and the way it works. Its search function is our primary motive for using Google. In the recent years, Google has expanded into general media company as it delivers video and text to users by adding Blogger and YouTube to its products. The first chapter primarily deals with the products and services of Google which makes it appear different from other companies. Working of Google is a new phenomenon and competitors with their old business strategic inputs cannot overcome the challenges and competition presented by Google.

In the Second chapter, Vaidhyanathan states that Google works so flawlessly and so fast that Internet Users without any alternatives have to rely on it. No doubt, Google offers us what we think and based on our Search results it offers us the information which we expect to be on our computer or laptop screens. The power of Google is in its Speed. Google's search algorithm is designed in such a way that every time we search something on the web, our desires and weaknesses are observed by the Google's system. Thus, we see advertisements which are related to our Search History. Talking about Page Rank concept of Google, Vaidhyanathan states that Google's search algorithm ranks pages according to the popularity of a page. If a website with a particular topic is popular among masses Google would rank that website on Page One when a user would search for that topic on the web. Page ranking has got nothing to do with the accuracy. Using Google is a Temptation for us as we have blind faith in it. We rely on Google for gaining an access to information which likewise is not easily available to us.

In the third chapter, Vaidhyanathan primarily focuses on the issue pertaining to user privacy. He states that by using social networking websites and search engine like Google our Privacy is at stake but we are not aware of it. We think of ourselves as customers or users but for Google we are its products. When we talk of Privacy we are not clear of what constitutes Privacy. We often assume that Privacy refers to hiding confidential personal information like sexual acts or drug abuse. Contrary to our assumptions Privacy is not just limited to personal choices or some specific behavioral traits which we wish to refrain from revealing. If we choose to declare some personal choices on Facebook, we may think that we are having a control over our privacy because we think that we are managing the release of that information in a context we think we understand. Vaidhyanathan proves that there are data mining companies which look for our personal information and sell them to third parties.

In the fourth chapter, Vaidhyanathan focuses on the concept of Public Sphere as discussed by Habermas. Vaidhyanathan throws some light on the possibility of Googlization of the World and prospects of Google turning into a powerful Global Public Sphere. Problem with Google turning into a Global Public Sphere is that many people all over the world still don't know how to use Internet. In some countries Internet speed is very slow; whereas in some parts of the world people don't have access to the basic necessities leave aside Internet. Also, Google functions and services are based on the location to which an individual belongs. Google offers us search results which are localized. So, search results will vary from location of country to location of another country. Variation in languages also prevents Google from transforming into global public sphere and creation of global civil society. Though Google offers translation tool but the tool is ineffective in translating the difficult words. Author elucidates that it was very difficult to translate Italian language book for Google translator and thus it got very difficult for him to read the Italian book. There is no doubt that Google Translator is

improving and trying to add up more languages to better its search results. Also, culturally there is variation in the way the Google is received.

In the fifth chapter, Vaidhyanathan states that knowledge is an instrument of the powerful. Anyone who has an access to knowledge can find an access to power. Mere usage of knowledge doesn't confer power on individuals but the powerful people have ways to use knowledge towards their own ends. Even though Google has provided its readers with an access to e-books but with that there is an uncertainty about the future of real libraries and paperback books. In 2004, Google scanned millions of books for more than twenty five university libraries. Techno Libertarians like Kevin Kelly felt that Google books would aid in transmitting knowledge and information to those who find it difficult to have an access to the library. On the other hand, publishers and authors initiated two high profile lawsuits against the Google Books Programs for Copyright Infringement. Google books Project failed to live up to the expectations of the people who applauded it as it failed to respect the copyright law. Google seems to be posing a danger to the future of learning. Many authors in China sued Google primarily for infringing their copyrights and secondarily for Google daring to scan their books without their permission. Though Google later apologized for its acts but then it became clear to all that digitization of knowledge is not an easy thing and there is certainly a price to pay for it.

In the sixth chapter, Vaidhyanathan candidly remarks that our memories are on the verge of being Googlized. We no longer need to lay stress on our memories to recall a significant event which we witnessed in the past. All we need to do is browse the search engine of Google with our query and we would get answer to our questions in five seconds. The interesting matter in the sixth chapter is author's nostalgia ensuing from the author's reminiscence of his Genius grandfather's power to memorize Sanskrit texts. The author is trying to point out how these days' people specifically Google Users are focusing on rote learning. There might be people willing to learn Sanskrit to study Indian Mythological text but these people would Google for Sanskrit verses rather than learning a Sanskrit verse and for many of them meaning of the   Sanskrit   verse   might   not   be important and their focus would be on the information rather than knowledge. Siva Vaidhyanathan with this book prompts us to ask ourselves if we are enduring the problem of our culture being globally affected by unrestricted access to texts, pictures, and music and if our persistent obsession to have an access to data from Google is preventing us to understand the difference between the   right   information   and   the wrong information. Vaidhyanathan illuminates that excessive crude information can lead to encumbrance in bringing forth usefulness of knowledge for it can be an otiose undertaking. So, there is no doubt an 'information overload' when people use Google. It gets difficult to analyze the true and the best search result. Vaidhyanathan elucidates with narratives that Google encourages bad behavior in terms of 'Academic Research' and one should not blindly rely on Google when it comes to Research. No doubt Google provides with information but then it doesn't tell us to discriminate between what is right and what is wrong.

Vaidhyanathan successfully concludes the book with an invitation for his readers to join him in 'The Human Knowledge Project'. According to Vaidhyanathan the aim of The Human Knowledge Project would be to contrive a distinct information ecosystem that would be thriving to compete with the Google and outlive it. This distinct information ecosystem would primarily aim at organizing the information further making information accessible ubiquitously.