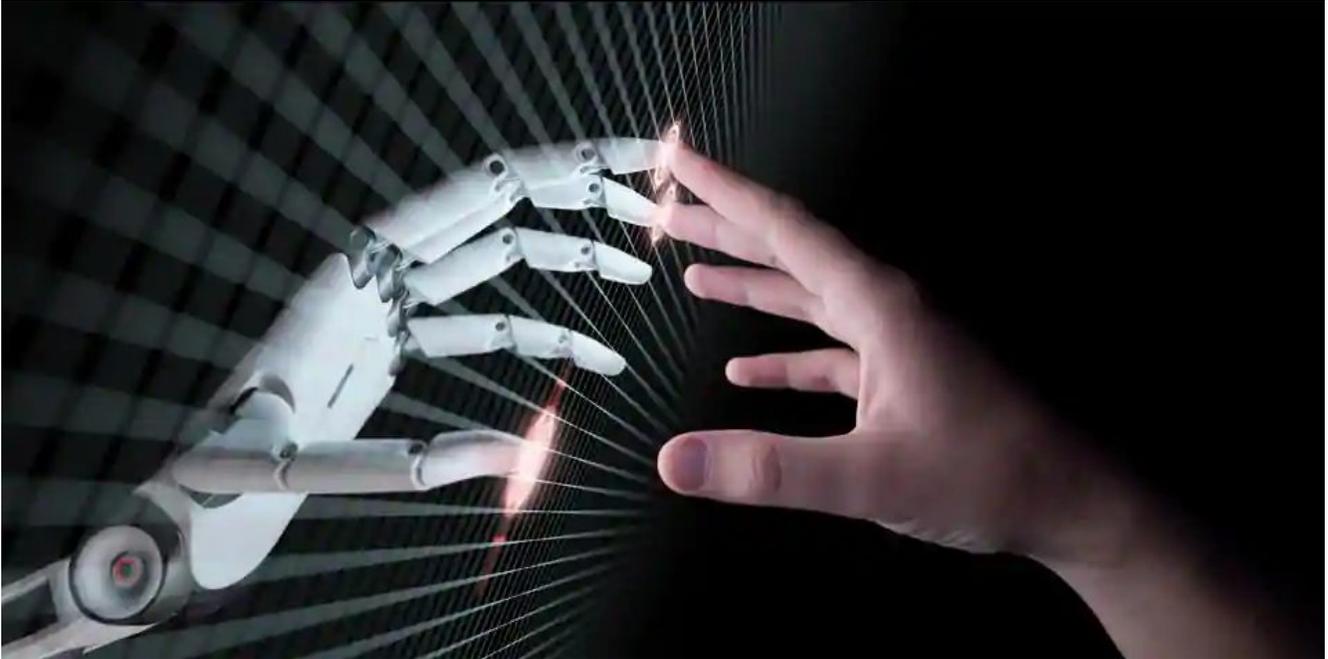


# AI: A force for social empowerment

India is committed to using AI for common good, while addressing privacy, ethical concerns

ANALYSIS by Ravi Shankar Prasad

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The success of Digital India has set a new global benchmark for leveraging digital technologies for inclusive growth, good governance and empowerment. The benefits of digital technologies have now become accessible for everyone. Rapidly-changing technology requires continuous evolution of systems, faster regulatory responses and building capacities. The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not just an incremental change, but a paradigm shift which must be harnessed for humanity's well-being.

Data is the basic building block for any AI system. India, with over 700 million internet subscribers, 1.21 billion phone-users and 1.26 billion Aadhaar users generates massive amounts of data daily. It has the largest user-base for some of the major global internet companies; it also offers the most affordable internet services in the world; and the information technology (IT) sector ensures the availability of competent human resources. These, coupled with the leadership of Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, a champion of technology as a way to improve people's lives, puts India at the cusp of the AI revolution.

In 2018, the National AI Strategy was published by the government. Since then, there have been several initiatives to develop a strong AI ecosystem. The Centre of Excellence in Data Analytics (CEDA) has been established to provide expert data analytics services to government departments. In collaboration with the IT industry, Centres of Excellence have been set up in Bengaluru, Gandhinagar, Gurugram and Visakhapatnam where, so far, 113 start-ups have been incubated, 29 Intellectual Properties have been generated, and 56 sectoral solutions have been developed. The Future Skills Prime online capacity-building platform has been launched to skill and reskill professionals in emerging technologies and in new job roles.

The National AI Portal has been launched as a one-stop digital platform for collaboration and knowledge-sharing in AI. Soon, the ministry of electronics and IT (MEITY) will launch the National Programme on AI.

Learning from public digital platforms such as Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface, Goods and Services Tax Network and Government e-Marketplace, the government has decided to encourage the setting up of several public digital platforms in health, agriculture, education, logistics and language translations. With the announcement of the National Digital Health Mission, work on a public digital platform for health has begun. MEITY is developing an AI-based Natural Language Translation Mission in collaboration with academic institutions, research institutions, industry and start-ups which will pave the way for a voice-enabled internet in Indian languages. Several ministries in collaboration with industry, academia and start-ups are in different stages of finalising sectoral public digital platforms. These will offer AI-based services while addressing the data security and privacy concerns of users.

Developments in technology also raise concerns. When large-scale computerisation was undertaken, there were concerns about mass unemployment. But eventually, computers and IT became one of the biggest job creators. In the same way, AI will replace certain existing job roles but also create several new job profiles. The world needs to manage this transition effectively so that it does not aggravate societal disparities. Through initiatives such as Future Skills Prime, India has already started work on reskilling its workforce for future job roles in IT. India's approach towards responsible AI for social empowerment seeks to leverage AI for inclusive growth and empowerment while addressing concerns over exclusion and job redundancy. The vision to use AI in health care, agriculture, education, logistics and languages is inspired by our commitment to leverage AI for social empowerment.

Data resources are going to play a vital role in AI's development, but concerns regarding the misuse of data and breach of privacy of users must be addressed by AI systems. The government has already introduced a robust Personal Data Protection Bill in Parliament, which seeks to protect the privacy of users in the digital age while facilitating the development of a strong data economy. Any attempt to create a monopoly in the digital space by misusing the data of citizens will invite a strong response from the government. The action taken against certain mobile apps recently clearly indicates that the Modi government is committed to protect the data privacy of Indian citizens and India's data sovereignty.

AI also generates other ethical and legal concerns that must be addressed. Algorithms that define the set of rules to operate AI systems must be free of any biases and prejudices. For example, face recognition systems must not display any racial or ethnic biases and news and social media systems must not be biased towards any particular political ideology. Conventional laws based on the basic premise of jurisdictions are being challenged by transnational technologies. Rogue elements situated in any part of the world can disrupt peace in other societies. We saw this in the recent Citizenship (Amendment) Act agitations and the Delhi riots. The world needs to collectively address these concerns.

India is one of the founding-members of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence — a multilateral collective to develop responsible AI, and is also working with several countries bilaterally to develop AI ecosystems. India's biggest AI summit RAISE 2020, which begins on Monday, seeks global collaboration for the development of an AI ecosystem that is responsible towards humanity and committed to social empowerment.

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