66. Computers: The Next Stage

Charles Van Doren

In this text the author analyses how the computer has taken over most of human behaviours.

First, the author highlights the contribution of Gutenberg to the invention of movable type which brought a complete change in the field of publication. Inventions and discoveries bring about changes that ultimately bring about new way of living and thinking. Gutenberg deserves the credit for being one of the most revolutionary inventors in history.

The final fifty years of fifteenth century (for the technology of printing) and the final fifty years of twentieth century (for computer technology) are very important.

Computers have dominated majority of human behaviours such as, communication, manufacturing, education, finance, trading, politics, scholarship, sports, and entertainment. There are computers at almost every workplace.

The author makes some predictions about the further functions of the computer. It would be a thinking machine. But he raises a serious moral question about intelligent machines. There may be a question of computer right just like human right and animal right. One day computers may object and large numbers of

human beings may protest in their behalf. But computers remain slaves because they are too valuable.

Within ten or twenty years a new kind of computer machine called companion computer (CC) may come on the market. It will have the following features:

Small and portable, has large memory, oral input, input by thinking, gives the owner necessary information, knows a good deal about the world, knows how to please its owner, entertains the owner, supports the ideology of its owner etc.

Another type of computer is thinking computer which learns things like human child. It is good at keeping records. But it will be a slow learner because it has no senses. The owner has to take care of it like his own child. It can be connected with television set so that it receives information. Within next fifty years a computer will tell a joke and ask whether it is funny.