CONCLUSION

The paradigmatic changes in the ways societies and cultures have responded to technical changes have clearly brought to fore new means of sociation. The relevance of social networking along with recognition of ‘social capital’ as an important dimension of socio-economic structure have aroused interest among scholars from varied academic backgrounds to understand these aspects of social life. Information is playing key role in carrying forward almost every aspect of human affair. So the quick exchange and dissemination of information would become a deciding factor in itself. The faster means of communication and technology and the digitisation of the information have eventually rendered a global communication system through computer-mediated interface (Internet). Internet is not a technology for accessing information it is a global communication system. The way Internet has metamorphosed from an information network to social network is in itself phenomenal. New version of Internet is termed as Internet 2.0 which is a superior level of technology, multimedia. The other terms which are used almost synonymous to Web2.0 is social media or the User Generated Content. The network paradigm is central to the structural organization of both the Internet and the society. Wellman argues that one of the important social transformation of late modernism is a shift away from tightly bounded communities toward increasing “networked individualism” in which each person is at the center of his or her own personal community. The individual of today finds his community in networks which are spread across distances, which are not ‘real’ but imagined. The identity of individual is not torn between the real and virtual but is extended and enhanced by his virtual presence. As Internet penetration is deeper, resultantly we see many socio-cultural implications.

This study aimed to understand the usage patterns of social network sites by individuals and the forms of content shared on these platforms. Discussion of contextualising these patterns in the larger cultural and commercial framework also includes the part of analysis. The other objectives were to access the impact of these new mediums on community dynamics and social activism. Owing to the descriptive nature of study triangulation method was used as both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to analyse the richness and complexity of the issue. As part of
the quantitative analysis a simple random sample was chosen of 189 individuals, who had a Facebook account. For qualitative analysis individuals who were running Facebook communities and users who had literally considered these platforms, as having enhanced their life in significant ways were interviewed. Apart from this other secondary sources in terms of stories published in the media were analysed. These stories helped to understand the ways in which such platforms had become such a regular part of day to day life. These narratives gave us insights in how social media has affected the larger socio-political setup. Apart from this having my own account on Facebook made me a participant observer.

India (as on Aug 2015) has around 350 million active Internet users (constituting 27% of the total population) and 590 million unique mobile users and 134 million active Facebook users and 97 million mobile social media users. The average time spent with the Internet (on PC or tab) is 4hr 43min and on mobile phone is 3hr 17 min, with social media is 2hr 36min. So this clearly reveals the growing importance of Internet and social media in India.

Regarding the social cultural profile of users and general usage pattern with respect to Facebook the following were some of the key findings of the survey conducted from Facebook users:-

1. Facebook is the most widely used SNS in India (as on August 2015 it has 134 million users), in fact it has the second largest user base outside USA. In terms of the demographic profile of the Facebook users of India, the users in age group of 20-29(68 million) constitute 50.7% of the total Facebook users. Younger people are open to new technologies and are more experimental. They also learn and adopt new techniques easily and quickly. So one would always come across more young people on Facebook and similar social media platforms. This also goes fairly well with our sample as most of the respondents belonged to the age group of 19-24 (48.1%) only handful of the respondents were above the age of 43 (6.3%).

2. Most of the users belonged to urban areas as compared to rural areas. For a person to have a Facebook account one would generally assume that one should have access to certain infrastructure in terms of a gadget and an internet connection or access to such cyber places in one’s vicinity. Given this there is greater likelihood of economically better off, urban, male to have
better access to these requirements. Since internet penetration amongst rural population is as low as 7% so this has significantly affected the user base.

3. Also Facebook in India is fairly male dominated zone as 76% of the users are men and 24% are women. This can be reasoned out to the prevailing socio-cultural setup of India. As women are confined to the household they are usually discouraged to interact with men or strangers in general. The autonomy, openness and connectedness for which these platforms stand for, comes in direct contrast with the prevailing socio-cultural value set up. Even in fairly educated middle class families women/ girls are discouraged from having their own cell phones. The very idea of male friend especially for a married women is considered to be not just strange but also carry immoral connotations.

4. Since individual should atleast be knowing how to operate a computer/mobile so that he may use social networking sites and some working knowledge of English, although Facebook is available in thirteen different languages apart from English. So educated people are more likely to use these platforms. Our survey reveal similar trends and all the respondents had some basic educational level.

5. Most of the users opened their account between the years 2010-2012. Perhaps if we look at the exponential growth of Facebook in India we will find similar trends.

6. Mobile connectivity:- This is in fact a very important parameter especially with the users in India because of the fact that even if Internet penetration is as low as 27%, India has 976 million mobile subscriptions that constitutes nearly 76% of India’s population. Half of the population (509 million) has mobile phones. Together with this 84% of the users use Facebook on their mobile even in our survey 76.1% of users were mobile Facebook users. So the future growth of Facebook users in India, the cell (smart) phones are going to be the gadget where the Internet is going to be accessed.

7. It is found that most of the users joined SNSs (here Facebook) to connect with people they know or in other words to connect with one’s friends is the most important motivation (and gratification) to join a social network site. Also for them the reason for choosing Facebook is that most of their friends have gone for Facebook. SNSs are grounded in the premise that both online and offline
people would rather connect with those who share acquaintances like an individual would rather be oriented to connect with a friend of a friend rather than a complete stranger. So we have shifted to environments that are nonymous (as opposed to anonymous).

8. Profile: - Identity is constructed on SNS by creating a public or semi-public profile. So what makes SNS distinct from other mediums and earlier Internet based communities is the ‘uniquely identified profile’ as compared to the earlier versions where people used pseudonyms. The most important indicator is one’s name and photograph. Secondly, this profile is located within the foci of one’s connections which in a way validates the authenticity of the user. Since identity construction is a performative act users take advantage of various technical affordances of the site to project the image across their networks. Both explicit (name, age, photograph) and implicit identity claims (tastes, hobbies, content sharing and publishing) are used to construct the identity. In our survey most (92.5%) of the users share their personal information on their profile page. So this clearly shows that there would be very few cases of impersonation.

9. Users normally believe that the correlation between individual’s actual personality and the personality as perceived from the Facebook account is high and even users themselves believe that there is a strong correlation between their real personality and the one they portray online.

10. The structural/architectural features of these sites determine to quite an extent to what affordances it lend to its users. For example Facebook provides for bi-directional ties as compared to twitter where ties can be unidirectional. The nomenclature also follows from the same like ‘friends’ on Facebook ‘followers’ on twitter on LinkedIn its ‘contacts’ or ‘connections’.

11. Coming to the networks, one of the unique feature of SNSs is the visible list of connections. So Facebook profile is a portrayal of one’s identity in a certain digitized environment where an individual is faced with multiple audiences As in real life we present different selves of ours on work, with friends or at home. But such a distinction is not made on Facebook, which might be one of its limitation. Having to present simultaneously to different groups in the same social encounter can really be a challenging exercise. This is termed as ‘context collapse’ where individuals from different social contexts may come
together on a SNS in potentially uncomfortable ways. So in this case the individual must then engage in multiple mini performances so as to produce the presentation of the self that makes sense to multiple audiences, without sacrificing coherence and continuity. On Facebook an individual has to engage with multiple audiences and manage competing demands in the same streams of information. So “audience segregation” is an important issue for performance or presentation on SNSs. By keeping different targets or audiences separate one can avoid the awkwardness of trying to present disparate images of themselves.

12. Although earlier internet based communities/discussion groups lacked authenticity (they lacked photographs and individuals used pseudonyms), so there was lot of impersonation and the trust factor of this medium was quite low. The scenario has changed since then. As the trust factors have gone up, the important point here is that, individuals are more inclined to voluntarily disclose information about themselves. Most of the respondents provide their key information on their profile pages. As the line between the public and private is in a state of flux, what was earlier considered to be belonging to the private realm is now easily displayed and discussed in public. These platforms have also brought about some normative changes in way people perceived certain things in their life. As the boundaries between the private and public blurs up things considered culturally awkward in the past are considered to be absolutely normal today. But still privacy is a major concern with the users more specifically with women. There have been many cases reported in media of impersonation or circulating morphed images of women users on the social networks. Women are definitely more concerned about sharing their information and have chosen for more stringent privacy settings. The survey revealed women fear more than men about sharing their personal information. Also Facebook provides its user with some detailed privacy options to choose from but most of the times it is the default settings that calls its way through the users.

13. Most of the users accessed their account once a day and even very few users expressed high involvement (16.93%) with Facebook. Interestingly among the users who were highly involved 65.62% were males and only 34.37% were females.
14. Nature of ties on Facebook is normally considered to be weak as only few of them can be termed as actual friends, although most of the users have long list of friends. Facebook now allows to segregate the friend list into acquaintances and close friends. Although the ties are weak but importance/relevance of weak ties to our contemporary social landscape have been considered to be crucial (Granovetter, Lin, 1982). It is believed that weak ties have the capacity for bridging information across disparate social groups. As in close knit group people carry almost the same information. The weak ties then can become source of information arising in other circles. As SNSs support large number weak ties it has the quality of bridging social capital. Also SNSs have been proved to supplement social capital. It has the capacity to convert a latent tie (a tie which has been once active and have now over a period of time due to relocation, or moving out of a particular space have become dormant) into a weak tie or strong tie. In our survey 45.5% users affirmed that they have benefitted from Facebook ties.

Coming to the forms of content, the most popular way of communicating on social network sites is to share the content streams, created by themselves or other people in their network. So the most common way to acknowledge is either by ‘share(ing)’ or ‘like(ing)’ the content originating from other sources. In our study, the most important form of communication was to ‘like’ friends’ photo, status updates and wall posts but when asked most of the respondents had a very vague understanding of what it means for them to “like” or “dislike”. The other popular forms were personal updates, followed by commenting on friend’s photos, status updates and wall posts and followed by Facebook chat whereas creating events and inviting friends, was the least popular. Average rating point of sharing among men was greater (5.45%) as compared to women (5.07%).

Uploading photographs is also very popular with the users. Photographs can normally be categorised into individual photos (the most important being the profile picture which is visible to all), group photos and selfies. The common themes with the group photos in the Indian context is the festival celebrations and weddings. Clicking and uploading of photographs has given way to new cultures and ways people participate in real life events. People have learnt the ways to pose for the photographs. On every occasion the focus of the individuals is to click a certain number of photographs at the
end of the event. Simplest of a get together is commemorated by the photographs. Study of the photographs of college students on Facebook shows a trend towards presence of same-sex subjects in photos. As Indian society, in general, practise stricter code of conduct with respect to the mixing of sexes. Similar observations were made with respect to the profiles studied by the researcher. In one of interview with a university professor who is running a Facebook community suggests that the fact that women are more conscious in putting any of their photographs on the SNSs with opposite sex even if it is a group photo especially when they are in search of matrimony. Most of the women who are married, their photo galleries are of either their spouses or kids or extended kin members.

Selfies have become the most common way to click photographs. The world ‘selfie’ means self-portrait i.e. image taken by holding a camera in one’s own hand. This is mostly done with the help of a digital camera. Selfies have become widely popular. People mostly take selfies to in order to post on SNS. Appeal of the selfie lies in the fact that it is easier to click and share and gives more control to the self-photographer to determine the way one wants to present oneself. Selfies are normally criticized for encouraging narcissistic tendencies among individuals. Selfies are equally popular with men and women. Women sometimes consider the act of taking a selfie as self-liberating and reclaiming their body from the ‘male gaze’. The selfies have become an important form of expression in the mainstream media with the celebrities and politicians. People carry selfie stands with them and every now and then one would come across people posing for these selfies. There are many incidents reported in media when people were injured or even died while clicking their selfies.

Commenting on other people’s photographs or status updates, also forms the part of photographic narrative. The comments are either in the form of small written sentences or very popular words like ‘nice’, ‘gr8’, ‘Aww..’, ‘fabulous’, ‘awesome’ etc. or emoji’s (emoticons or pictographic images to display one’s reactions) or combination of both. So producing/publishing content is the way individuals communicate on SNSs. Every post like a new status, a note, a video, a photo or a link to an article or cause signify something about the person who publishes /share it. In our study we find high usage of emoji’s by users to display their emotional reactions. Use of mixed language is also on the high, mixed language denotes a distinction between script and language, what is off late emerging in India especially amongst
urban bred users, having been taught in schools of English medium whereby they can speak their mother tongue but are poor in writing it. Most of them find it difficult or hardly know typing of their native script. So what they normally do is that while communicating in their native language they write in Roman script or a mixture of both English and regional language but script here again is Roman only.

The concept of ‘phatic’ culture given by English sociologist Vincent Miller about communication on social media quite aptly describes the form of communication on these social networking sites. Communications are phatic in the sense that the content, as it is not very meaningful but with every share and comment what one is trying is, to acknowledge the presence of other or to mark one’s presence in the network. Rise of the use of emoji’s, moving away from blogs to microblogging or social network, the click and use architectural designs of these websites all point towards the direction that content is ‘non-dialogic and non-informational’. So here “content is not king, but ‘keeping in touch’ is. The connection to the other person becomes more important than the exchange of words.

Although the content is defined to be non-dialogical and non-informational and carries only social significance or in the light McLuhan’s phrase ‘network is the message’. Also if users are only sharing the content created somewhere else then can we really call the content as user generated? Although it might be the case that content is created by handful of users or websites who are there for commercial purposes yet social media has given power to the common user to broadcast himself. Nevertheless, Facebook or other such platforms provided the broad architecture and guidelines or limits the forms of exchange yet users continually play with these boundaries. For an average user it is a platform to connect with the people in his/her network and way to connect is by sharing content streams either created by him or coming from other sources. Apart from this Facebook provide many add on activities to playfully engage with each other like zoombies or dares or challenges or games. Facebook over a period of time has evolved itself to bring a wholesome experience to its users.

One issue that needs to be of concern that although these spaces are non-profitable (like Facebook login page mentions that “it is free and will always be”) most of these are inherently profit driven environment. Facebook captures all the data that users feed while creating a Facebook profile. This provides wonderful opportunity to advertisers to streamline the target audience on the basis of various criteria’s like
sexual orientation, status of relationship or education level, their designations, employers or universities they study. There are other ways of targeting users like on the basis of their interest (e.g. groups they have joined, pages they like). As people spend more and more time on Facebook they also share lot of information about their activities which has become of great relevance to the marketers. Facebook hesitantly went to advertising on their pages but today it shows no reluctance to it. The user content is filtered and sold to other sites for putting customized links to user’s wall pages in order to influence their purchasing decisions. Although users do retaliate to such issues like when Facebook implemented their Beacon system tracking user purchases and other activities across the Internet and announcing them to their friends, user backlash forced them to change their plans (Baym, 2001). So these sites are definitely located within the larger commercial interests of corporates and advertisers.

The debate whether Internet can support communities akin to real life communities has been going on since the time Internet based virtual social groups became popular. Benedict’s concept of community as ‘imagined’ entity make the case of computer-mediated communities as holding possibilities for the future. Internet was hailed as a medium where individuals could look for community like structures which they have lost in physical worlds. So there were many academic research works on online communities where researchers argues that these online groupings indeed carry the characteristics of regular communities like they did develop shared norms, meet regularly, talk, display a sense of belongingness and help each other. So ultimately it was ascertained that the ‘community’ metaphor is the most popular way of describing these groups which even hold true for the SNSs. On Facebook there is no direct word “community” as such, for its founders believe or imagine or build a discourse that the entire fraternity of Facebook users is indeed a community. In all their press notes they refer to the growth of Facebook as “Our community now has more than 1.59 billion people.” Or “Thank you for being a part of our community, and for helping to connect the world”. So the most important way to build close-knit activities around common interests is to create a ‘Group’. According to the official Facebook statistics around 1 billion people use groups each month. The other way to harness a collective attention to create a Facebook page which is typically meant for the purpose of broadcasting one’s activities be it a brand, entity (place or organization), or public figure or celebrity. Content posted to a Page is public and viewable by everyone who can see
the Page. Again this brings together people with common interests. Facebook statistics proclaim around 50 million small businesses use Pages.

Facebook groups which are created by individuals for connecting group of people around a common shared interest, it may be the alumni of an institution or the pass-outs of a particular batch, or a caste group or a group about a common interest (author, book, film, and place). It is observed that the group attracts initial members for their catchy titles (I hate my boss, I want to lose weight) or the title has some nostalgic element to it (Nagmani (magazine), DD national serials, Pakistani serials, Sector-17 Geri route) but what happens to the content into these groups over a period of time is that it gets trivialised, the user participation is lowered. Unless and until the admin of the group is not active enough to get the group out of this trivialising effect, the whole idea of the group is lost over a certain period of time. Members start sharing news clip items or some commonly viral material from other sites, so that the originality or the purpose for which it was started, mainly to connect people with common interests or to initiate discussion around shared subject, is lost. Due of this number of groups on Facebook have become redundant. But in the go these groups might help people to find individuals with shared interests. What might be an interesting aspect to investigate is how these groups might become active when something pertaining to their cause happens in real life. For e.g. the caste groups which otherwise don’t find regular visitors or comments or activity might suddenly become active when something pertaining to caste happens in the real life? Whereas on the other hand the Facebook pages (political party, celebrity, public figure or small businesses) which are managed by some professional teams or even individuals who are active enough to create momentum among the members have been fairly successful in harnessing attention, discussion and support.

Apart from individual networking, social media in general (of which social network sites are the most important and popular genre) has come to be recognised as an important medium for dissemination of information and articulation of public opinion. Along with electronic medium it has tremendous capability to influence public opinion. Also because of its decentralised nature it add peculiarities and has the capability to overpower the centralising and hegemonic tendencies of traditional broadcast mediums like television and newspapers. This is here where social media
can lead to some revolutionary changes within societies. It has almost been both academically and otherwise recognised to be an important public sphere in the making. The role that Internet has played in the contemporary social movements be it Arab spring, Occupancy movements in America, Egyptian and Tunisian revolts proves that it has the capacity to threaten the regimes. Revolt in Egypt to outset the Hosni Mubarak regime has attracted lot of scholarly attention and some even term it as "the first Internet Revolution" and as the movements progressed the regimes tried to curb it by closing down the Internet services in the region. The dynamism which social media lends to social movements is both unique and remarkable as the earlier technologies or methods (like use of leaflets, posters and faxes etc.) lacked the kind of speed and interactivity that social media affords. Its global outlook enable activists from world over to join social-networking groups, to follow events and engage in discussions.

Social media has been found to be an important platform for political socialisation of people and an important source of political information. The SNSs proved to be a more accurate predictor of political attitudes and behaviour. Individuals frequently resort to YouTube or Facebook or Twitter or other such platforms for obtaining political information. Within the Indian context it has emerged as an important medium for generating and endorsing political opinion and has also been put to use by groups for harnessing and garnering support for their causes( e.g. by feminists or various caste groups). The rise and success of AAP in India which also heralds a fundamental change in the Indian political makeup is also, in part, hailed to the role of social media. As already discussed Internet penetration in India is as low at 27% yet if we look into the sheer number of users it is quite formidable. Indians are very active with the social media. When Khejriwal found the AAP, he had this group of young media-savvy users in mind and hence he spearheaded his campaign on these platforms. Although BJP and Congress have larger presence on the social media if we go by number of individuals ‘likes’ to the official Facebook page of the above parties. This should also be considered within the context that AAP is a nascent party whereas other two parties are veterans in all sense of the term and they have pan India presence. AAP in its small stint of just four years have a remarkable social presence. Also if we look into the content on Facebook pages of both the Congress and BJP, we would find that, though they have adopted this media they seem to be distant from
their supporters. They only broadcast their activities. Obviously the BJP is on the side of declaring their achievements and Congress trying to belittle them (also AAP) but the mode of communication is one-directional or at times (near elections) too submissive. The language of BJP is of arrogance or of Narendra Modi is to project an over the top image of himself, whereas on the other hand, being a party which was being cradled by the social media, for AAP, social media streams are an important way to reach out to its supporters, volunteers and voters. This has a profound influence on the way they handle their social media presence. The content on AAP’s Facebook page is generally more interactive in nature and they addresses themselves directly to its readers. The content is brainstorming as well as heart-warming.

The Pink Chaddi campaign marked the beginning of recognition of social media as an important tool for activism by Indian feminists. The campaign was launched in 2009 and since then the digital technology has been used by Indian feminists for procuring support for number of feminist issues. Dalit activism too find its way to social media. There are innumerable caste groups on Facebook. The presence of innumerable caste groups not only reinforce group norms but questions the autonomy and individuation that these mediums represent.

India is emerging as an important destination on the digital map of the world. Precisely for the very same reason the social media giants are eyeing on Indian users for their future growth. This is of course, in the economic sense, an unleashed domain. Facebook is collaborating with other partners for its Internet.org project. It named it as Free Basics by Facebook, which is going to provide people with access to basic websites for free – like news, job postings, health and education information, and communication tools like Facebook.

As the line between the real and virtual blur, new possibilities are evoked in the social and the cultural realm. The narratives on social media allows one to have glimpse into the life influencing and life defining characteristics that this media has brought to the life of individuals. For example, for many individuals Facebook and other such social media has opened immense possibilities to realize their desire to share their innate (creative) talents or to follow up their interests by joining groups. Conversations with such individuals during the course of study revealed the empowering facet of this medium in terms of sharing and creative co-creation among users who happened to meet on virtual groups. The e-learning tools have become very popular with the youngsters. These e-learning tools are mostly in the form of videos uploaded on the
YouTube and are becoming very popular with the students across India. Suddenly in many university libraries one would find students hooked to these video lessons. Some of them, with the help of this medium, have been able to contribute to the social causes they believed in. Many individuals have turned their presence on social media into lucrative endeavours. With more the number visitors or clicks they have to their blogs or Facebook or Twitter or Instagram accounts, more attractive they become to the potential advertisers. Once they engage a certain number of following they are contacted by companies for endorsing their products. There are many beauty, lifestyle, food, travel bloggers who are already making money by promoting brands in their posts. The narratives on social media reflect and represent myriad forms, diversities and dynamics of Indian reality. This has profound influence on not just the way individuals socialize but the way community and society is organised and has recognizable social, political and cultural implications. On this vibrant socially thriving media, the categories are contested, renegotiated, recreated and redefined. Social media terrain in India represents as much variance and diversity for which Indian society is known for. The virtual is not aloof from the real. Individuals carry their identities, awfulness, hopes and fears onto these platforms. Social media empowers commoners, break boundaries, crumble hierarchies and unsettle notions. As more and more individuals are going to embrace this domain which stands for massive communication, free speech and cult of individual autonomy this is surely going to result in social churning.