Innovative Teaching related to the 'Metaverse' in the Humanities Classrooms of Our Engineering Colleges

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Abstract **The increasing importance of the concept of the 'Metaverse' has opened up the possibilities of a new way of socializing, entertaining and working in an immersive space which will also be a kind of collective space. There is therefore the pressing need of a adopting a new outlook in our educational system. Exciting Innovative Teaching Practices can prepare our students for the 'Metaverse'. It is important to recognize, that not only the Engineering departments, but even the Humanities and Social Science departments will have a key role to play in carrying out innovative teaching in the Humanities classrooms.**

Keywords — Metaverse, Immersive Space, Humanities, Vocabulary, Virtual Platforms, Digitised Games

I. INTRODUCTION

In October 2021 Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook proclaimed to the world "I believe the Metaverse is the next chapter for the Internet'**[1].**

The word 'Metaverse' has become a keyword not only in the business world, but also in the Academia. Ever since 'Facebook', the media giant changed its corporate brand name from 'Facebook' to 'Meta,' the word Metaverse has become the focal point for discussion.

II. ORIGIN OF THE WORD 'METAVERSE'

The question might arise as to what role, if any, the Humanities classrooms have in teaching about the Innovative ideas related to this revolutionary concept of a Metaverse. Since 'Facebook' and computers and the high speed internet and concepts like 'Augmented Reality' and 'Virtual Reality' are very much related to the world of science and technology, it would seem only technical people, and specially those associated with the Computer Sciences, could be associated with such new concepts.

If one asks whether Mark Zuckerberg himself, or some other renowned Computer Scientist in recent times has created this word 'Metaverse', the answer would be a resounding "No".

Literature review suggests that in 1992, the novelist Neal Stephenson in his novel 'Snow Crash' created a 'computer generated universe' **[2].** There is a fictional character called Hiro who inhabits this imaginary world:

'In the lingo, this imaginary place is known as the Metaverse. Hiro spends a lot of time in the Metaverse' **[3].**

So whether academicians and lay people realize it or not, the concept of the 'metaverse' has its origin in the Humanities, and it is therefore not so surprising that the Language classrooms of our colleges, specially technical colleges do have a key- role to play in opening up the ideas associated with this new concept of a universe which seems to be an extension of science fiction.

III. THE PRESSING NEED FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHING OF SOME OF THE KEY WORDS AND IDEAS RELATED TO THE METAVERSE

Teaching about the concepts of the 'Metaverse' in the Humanities Classrooms.

Not many people know about the novelist Neal Stephenson, but it is worth teaching our students to remember and respect the fact that many of the best ideas in Science have come from the Arts and that everything is intertwined at the highest level.

Also, the language teachers in the Humanities departments would be responsible for making the students acquainted with the words that our students of technology would need

to negotiate, since the barriers of science and technology keep on expanding everyday.

With the social media giant Facebook highlighting the term 'Meta' and 'Metaverse' these words have gained in importance. Amongst other things in Engineering colleges, the English Language and Communication papers often lay a great deal of stress upon Vocabulary. The students are often taught about the vocabulary needed not only for cracking competitive examinations, but also for equipping them for their academic life, as well as for equipping them for the techno-commercial world they might need to handle.

Not many grammar books and vocabulary lists even in popular books like 'Word Power Made Easy', have segments on the ever-evolving dynamic concepts like the Metaverse.

It is imperative that the language teachers of our times point out that from the vocabulary point of view 'Metaverse' is a portmanteau word; and consists of 2 parts ie 'meta' + 'universe'.

Meaning of the concept of the Metaverse

At the simplest level, the Metaverse has been defined as a 'virtual reality space in which users can interact with a computer- generated environment and other users' **[4].** So practically speaking this is a kind of collective virtual space where both physical and digital realities seem to merge together. Metaverse conceives of a 'highly immersive virtual world' where the human entities carry out work, and business and even have a community life together.

If the Literature review is looked at in the past couple of years, it is clear that the word 'Metaverse' though not a new word has come into wide usage whether we like it or not.

IV. METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE 'METAVERSE' IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

It is imperative for all Engineering colleges under AICTE to have a Language Laboratory. It is a common feature nowadays to teach the students with the help of softwares and audio-video materials. Apart from language drills, there is a lot of scope not only for mock sessions on Group Discussion(GD), Personal Interview(PI), but also for role plays **[5].**

Not only the technical teachers, but also the teachers of Humanities have a role to play in gradually sharing these visionary ideas that are evolving.

1. It might need someone tech savvy to deal with terms like Web 2.0 and web 3.0 and terms like 'blockchains', but surely Ideas and terms related to the Metaverse like Avatar' ; 'Virtual Reality'; ' Augmented Reality' can be explored in the language classrooms also . Students can be asked to discuss these concepts and asked to find out about 3D experiences **[6]**

2. Students can be asked if they have watched any 3D movies by wearing special headgears or goggles and if so whether the 'metaverse' would possibly be an immersive space and experience like that?

3. Students could be given to explore the possibilities of interacting with friends and colleagues across an immersive virtual space. They could be asked about the pros and cons of such a situation.

4. In the coming days, the Metaverse would in offer greater flexibility to people, in terms of learning; working together; as well as it could open up the market as never before. In our Humanities classrooms, there are many classes allotted to Management, Business Ethics, Entrepreneurship. Teachers of these subjects could be encouraged to go in for innovative teaching and explore the possibilities that will arise if the future generation is to function in such a world.

5. Sometimes in Engineering colleges students feel a sense of disconnect from the Humanities related subjects. However, if the Humanities related subjects can go in for innovative teaching and encompass in its syllabus and incorporate some of the new developments that are taking place in science, and engineering it would attract greater attention from the learners.

For instance, one can teach new concepts through

playing games. Many of our students are attracted by digitised games. They would also be enthralled by the fascinating world of the Metaverse and the new games and gaming terms associated with it [**7**]. If a teacher of Humanities can use this to his or her advantage, the class would be his or hers and half the battle of teaching about the 'metaverse related vocabulary would be won.

V. Possible Outcomes of Innovative Teaching related to the Metaverse in the Humanities Classrooms:

Students will be made aware of the fact that there are new ideas and concepts which must be now adapted to. Also they will be not only tech savvy, but market ready for the world outside. They will also keep abreast of the changing times.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is important to realize that the way we think; interact; socialize; study or work might change in the coming days. The concept of 'METAVERSE' and the concept of immersive reality, and shared space, would require a different kind of vocabulary: a new kind of scientific, as well as social, economic and legal educational framework to deal with it. In future, our students would need to be equipped with new terminology and new knowledge. Both the Humanities Department and the Engineering Departments of our Engineering colleges will have to work in tandem to empower our students with the new concepts in order to negotiate the new universe and the new portal of knowledge that is opening up.

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