

Gopal T V, Anthony Lobo, Pavan Duggal:

Ethics for Indian Cybertariats

Abstract:

"India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great grandmother of tradition"

- Mark Twain

"Cybertariat" refers to the Societal Governance deploying the Information and Communication Technologies [ICT]. Indian Cybertariats strive to achieve Inclusion in the context of very intricate relationships amongst Religion, Experience and Language. There are several ethical challenges ahead on the road to digitization. This issue is a modest attempt at highlighting the crucial concerns that determine the progress of the largest democracy in the world.

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Introduction

The current consumerism in the ICT domain is resulting in the building of the social structure on a major fault-line called "Digital Divide".

In India there are as many as four types of digital divides to reckon with.

The first divide is that which exists within every nation, industrialized or developing, between those who are rich, educated, and powerful, and those who are not.

A second digital divide, less often noted, is linguistic and cultural. For Indians who speak no (or little) English, the barriers to the Information Age are almost impossible to surmount. Local language and local content are essential. However, the pace of work in the area of "Language Technologies" is painstakingly slow.

The third digital divide follows inevitably from the first two -- it is the growing digital gap between the rich and the poor nations.

The fourth divide is that which is emerging between the elite few beneficiaries of the lucrative technologies such as ICT and equally talented many who studied other less lucrative but equally important areas of science and technology.

The four types of the Digital Divide in India can be aggravated by the way the liminal space is interpreted.

"Liminality is derived from 'limen', meaning threshold. The challenges for inclusion in the Indian Context are best comprehended through the "Liminal Space". The 'liminal space' might be read as a metaphorical realm where ideas and concepts: artistic, political, cultural, social or otherwise, are in constant states of contestation and negotiation.

Liminality is neither completely inside or outside any given situation structure or mindset. Liminality can result in the collapse of certainty and gives ample scope for many ethical dilemmas in the Cybertariats. India has unique views of interpreting Liminality that enabled civilizations flourish all over the world.

The "Liminal Space" is in between the known and the unknown. It is a transitional space of an accentuated experience resulting from crossing the threshold of what is known. The concept of the 'liminal space' as introduced by anthropologist Victor Turner, suggests the idea of ambiguity and ambivalence. This in-between space should allow active exchanges of ideologies, concepts and methods of working. There is an indication of a transition from one state or space to another, an on-going search for answers, yet the end point might not or need not be defined.

The "Fountain Head of Ideas" that India has been for the entire world has copious methods of adapting the technology for governance through the Indian Cybertariats.

Some Core Concerns

Predictions that widespread usage of computers often results in revolutionary changes in the employment opportunities for the people were dominating the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the middle of the 1960s, privacy came into sharp focus. In 1967, Alan Westin published the book titled "**Privacy and Freedom**". In 1976, Joseph Weizenbaum published the book titled "**Computer Power and Human Reason - From Judgement to Calculation**". Both these highly influential works made many professional societies form working groups and committees to address the emerging global challenges in Cyberspace.

The most serious fall out of liminal space is in the domain of "Surveillance". Cooperation amongst the devices / things with different sensing, computing and communication capabilities is resulting in growing number of

research problems in information ethics. These include domotics (domestic robotics), environmental monitoring or "smart / intelligent cities" and so on. Due to paucity of floor space, the compact and very powerful devices are also being embedded within the inner side of the ceiling in many facilities.

"The belief that surveillance societies are not going to emerge because of efforts in data protection is naive; in fact, the existence of Data Protection Commissioners may actually stimulate the flavoring of surveillance societies by lulling the public into a false sense of security."

- David Flaherty

Psychologists call "liminal space," a place where boundaries dissolve a little and one is on the threshold to move across the limits of what one is and what one is to be. It represents ambiguity, of marginal and transitional state. It manifests as several mystic effects including faith healing.

Liminality is also said to be destructive and chaotic. Hence, the Indic methods warrant a strict adherence to certain practices. Only experience can justify / provide any rationale for certain practices. Indians are neither liars nor outliers. It is a fact that the liminal space is modeled in a characteristic Indian way. The data deployed by the Indian Cybertariats always runs the risk of being skewed. "Information Ethics" may be a better method in many such contexts. The following challenges in mapping the "Virtual World of ICT to Reality" in the Indian context of liminality emerge.

- Specifying the kinds of work which involves ICT and the corresponding Job Roles?
- Can there be "e-minister", "e-inclusion" or "e-work" definable in practice?
- The myth of procuring ICT with an assumption that it is working for some other customers of the said vendor.
- The myth that all the technical capacities that are necessary are readily available or can be purchased or hired at reasonable cost.
- The myth that a better version of the ICT is in the offing while the integration and testing of this version has barely begun.
- Humanizing the ICT judiciously to negotiate the landmines in entire process.
- Is our ICT Infrastructure capable of managing and optimizing the innate and respectful feature of garnering and documenting Indic Data and the Software that makes it actionable?
- The "Knowledge Worker" in the Indian Context of Ethos, Pathos and Logos
- What is the meaning of a given symbol for a particular person and / or a specific group?
- What are the facts about the particular person or specific group does the enable the given symbol to have acceptable meaning?
- The changing roles of the Law Makers, Laws and the Citizens

"If you can't measure it, you can't manage it" won its place in the Big Book of Business Dogma because the business world, or at least the bureaucratic edifice it relies on, is all about measurement. If we can slap a metric on something, we're going to do it. We love to measure things, because it makes us feel as though we're really doing something.

Measurement warrants stopping the action, getting outside of it and holding it up against a yardstick, exactly the opposite of the activity that would create products or ship them, make customers happy or move our business forward in any way. Most of the time in the business world, goals come down from on high, and the appropriate measuring devices, rubrics or protocols come with them. **Measurement is really our drug in the world.**

There are many things that cannot be measured and still must be managed.

"It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement - that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others, and that they underestimate what is of true value in life."

- Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

"We tend to overvalue the things we can measure and undervalue the things we cannot."

- John Hayes

Karl Pearson is often considered to be the father of the modern discipline of statistics, which emerged from his work in mathematical biology or biometry. Pearson attempted to make Eugenics an integral aspect of his theory on Statistics. Liminality is crucial to factor both "good [as in Public good]" and "the biometric entity that makes it".

"Pluralism matters because life is not worth living without new experiences - new people, new places, new challenges. But discipline matters too; we cannot simply treat life as a psychedelic trip through a series of novel sensations."

- Tim Harford, "Adapt: Why Success Always Starts with Failure"

About this Special Issue

"India does not live in its towns but in its villages. But if the cities want to demonstrate that their populations will live for the villagers of India the bulk of their resources should be spent in ameliorating the condition of and befriending the poor. We must not lord it over them, we must learn to be their servants. When the cities realize that they must live for the welfare of the poor, they will make their palaces and institutions and the life of their inhabitants correspond somewhat to our villages."

- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Young India, 23 April 1931

As this issue reaches the reader, India is firmly on the road to Digitization that began with a currency change. India is pushing forward towards digitization. We are now looking at a "Young Digital India" with all of us having a stake thanks to the rapid strides made with globalization as a start. The way Indic information ought to happen / happens makes one think again "Is it an "Ethical Dilemma" or a Call on Conscience?"

This issue of IRIE will explore the cultural and ethical dimensions of Indian Cybertariats in a digital age, looking at the implications, challenges and future of a digitally governed global village.

This special issue has four articles written exclusively by leaders in the field. It is very vital to observe that two of the editors were actively involved in two major International conferences related to the theme of this issue during November 2016. The summaries of these conferences are very timely and stimulating.

Three very important articles are in the further reading section of this special issue. They are very thought provoking and make the reader progress further in the areas addressed by this theme issue.

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