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Ethics for Indian Cybertariats

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

Mark Twain

"Cybertariat" refers to the Societal Governance deploying the Information and Communication Technologies [ICT]. 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.

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.

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.

The following challenges in mapping the "Virtual World of ICT to Reality" in the Indian context of liminality are addressed in this special issue.

- 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

- Role of Cyberlaw as a catalyst for ensuring compliance with ethics and related issues

Papers on these and other infoethical related issues such as privacy, surveillance, cybercrime or robotics are welcome. The papers should explicitly address ethical issues in the Indian context.

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1. Brett Matthew Wilbur, At the Threshold: Liminality, Architecture, and the Hidden Language of Space,Master of Science in Architectural Studies (Thesis), The University of Texas at Austin, May 2013.

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