

Sam Pitroda

**Medicinal Plant et al**

On my part, I have been involved with what we call the Foundation of Revitalisation of Local Health, where we are documenting 12,000 of our medicinal plants. Fortunately, it has been working well for the last 15 years now.

India has this 12,000 medicinal plants which are unique to our climate. So around 15 years ago, a young Darshan Shankar came to me in Technology Mission days and said it would be good to document this heritage. No one had a good database about what are these plants, what is their genetic base, genetic pool, genetic pool dime, technical analysis or where it is used. So he set up a foundation in Bangalore. After initial struggle, we got funding from the Danish government and put together a group. It's a non profit organization. Thankfully, now we have the money. Tata gave us

# Change the DNA of the whole system overnight!

**T**here is a Herculean task before India. The task is the development of the country. As an Indian, I would say that we need to realize how important it is the role of information communication technology in digital content and digital services as far as the developmental sector is concerned. India has a huge potential in this field, which results from our disparity and diversity, coupled with our strong heritage in art, culture, music, food, paintings.

This gives us a huge canvas of our own content. If you look back a little, you will realise that we have created a lot in the last two-three years that needs to be documented with the help of digital media. Besides, we have to remember that the content has to be about things that really made an impact on the history of India. Whether it is about our religious places, our poetry, our way of life. A lot of content needs to be documented. We had made a move in this direction during Rajiv Gandhi's time at the Indira Gandhi Centre of Art & Culture.

around 36 crores. We have a huge campus with 110-120 people who have dedicated almost 12 years to the cause.

Few people understand that cultural content is not about Bollywood songs. You know it's about this huge reservoir of lot of cultural data, scientific data, I mean the documentation of our paintings, all our art, our music forms, our languages, is the starting point.

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**Content for decreasing divide**

We have to start somewhere. In a country like India, where we have this huge divide between the haves and the haves not, between the urban and the rural, between educated and uneducated, our efforts have to be directed towards decreasing the divide. We cannot wait for the divide to disappear. Creating content is fundamental to decreasing the divide. So, on one hand the job is to create whole new content and documenting it, followed by targeting the people for whom it is meant for, and the issue of how will it be

delivered.

We must remember that this cannot be accomplished by a single soul. It requires thousands and thousands of people.

I believe that the local content which we are creating is short of what may be used as a domestic content. Bollywood songs, mobile tunes, Ganpati animations, all this is not the local content that I am talking about. I feel the question is how to bring the already existing digital content into the virtual world. We probably have more regional content than any other country. I am convinced of that.

Nowhere will you find such diversity. Multiple tribes, multiple races, multiple religions, you name it and we have it. Our local content is very rich. Be it the Madhubani Paintings, or some tribal art (even art of masks), or tribal languages. All this is real world her-

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itage of our own content which needs to be brought before the masses through the virtual medium. Here the process of digitization comes into picture.

### Where is accountable democracy?

I would like to draw your attention towards mobilisation of the last mile, or reaching out to that man at the far end or the end of the ladder. My concern is that a mechanism to reflect the accountability of the representatives in a huge democracy like India is non-existent. Where is the platform for the masses to get an answer to their questions about the manner in which the MPs, MLAs etc are dispensing their duties? You won't see even a single Panchayat, MLA or MP portal or website. ICT is hardly used to inform the people. None of those in seat of authority are interested. Also, MPLADS fund does not give scope for the same.

To connect the representatives and those whom they represent is a rare phenomenon. When I think it seems really funny, that I select people, I elect people, send them to the Parliament, to an Assembly, but they are not accountable. This is unfair. If we start the trend, linking representatives with the people, you will suddenly have 5000 websites resplendent with the nitty gritties.

I attribute such a situation to the fact that openness is not a part of the culture. The IT culture requires openness, clarity, connectivity, and decentralization . It is not there. Nobody wants to do that.

This is a cultural problem. It has nothing to do with technology. The information, what I didn't do or what did I do? Who wants to reveal it, who wants to do it? Where are the people who want to evaluate that performance?

If you look at expansion of governance, there is e-governance in India. However, governance is really not up to the mark in our country, despite all the money that we have spent on it and keep spending. At least I do not feel satisfied as a citizen. I really need to look at 20 processes which have contributed to improving services provided to the citizens. Have they really succeeded? Has it changed our culture of unaccountability? Have

we become open, responsible, accountable and answerable? If not, then it is e-governance for namesake and not for real change.

### Absence of 'e' in education

Coming to education, every school should have its presence on the web. I need to know my physics teacher. My question is how many teachers are there on the net? What about places of higher learning, like IIT and IIM portals. Every university should have a portal. All course work, all grades, all admissions, the background of all teachers, all courses, what the teacher teaches, everything should be there on the portal. These are institutes of higher learning, so they should set the trend. I believe the representatives of the people will eventually follow. Not even the so called progressive institutions have done it.

### Active district portals are needed.

You need portals for every district. For example, I am in a district of Balangir where I was born and I need to know about the place, what is the size of the district, its demography, how many schools are there, the teachers, colleges, business activities of the district and much more. But who is going to do it?

Most people do not understand the information technology culture, even the best of intellectuals. It's all about openness, all about accessibility, connectivity, it's all about networking, it's all about decentralization. I think it requires people to be very accessible. If I can talk to you, I should be able to talk to a person in Uganda at the same time. How do I change the way I see the world today? Today, the entire world is going through a major transformation. The world has to be made a more local place.

But we are still teaching our children the same way that we were teaching thousand years ago. Classroom, duster, blackboard, chalk, teacher, exam, textbook.

ICT needs to be made much more use of, and also the all new methods we will have to adopt. New economy has to be developed, new skills have to be developed. Everything today is localized, and information bridges the distance.

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### How to change DNA

It is not possible to change the DNA of the whole system overnight. People have to understand the value of information and digital content, which they do not. The digitisation process and documentation of content will in the end effect generations. However, a lot of work has started taking place.

E-governance is a good way to reach out to people, to improve access to each. Birth certificates have to be made available through the internet. Why is the birth certificate different in every state? There are 10 IDs which a person has to have, from a ration card to a driving license to so man more things. There should be same admission forms to fill, may be 5 to 10% of difference, all of them available on the web. Land records should be available on the net.

On one hand you need standardization, and on the other its implementation.

### Let's work together

There are a few points which we need to concentrate upon while working towards the digitization process, or digital content creation process, or digital service deliv-

ery process. This will push the process into a fast forward mode.

First and foremost, successful e-governance has to be our target. We need to identify the areas where e-governance has to be strengthened, fund them properly through public private partnership, and make it global content. The implementation of e-governance has to be at the district level.

We must remember that all these efforts require large amount of participation from people.

We have started doing things in our capacity. We have India Water Portal ([www.indiawaterportal.org](http://www.indiawaterportal.org)) in association with Arghyam. In energy we have a portal with Teri, in environment with the Centre for Science and Environment. A health portal is coming up soon.

The Knowledge Commission requires a lot of pool from

people to connect. We need an education portal which we just launched in collaboration with Azim Premji Foundation:  
<http://www.azimpremjifoundation.org/html/TeachersPortal.htm>.

We need a portal for teacher's training, we need a portal for garbage collection, we need portal for various other such things. There are thousands of portals needed to connect people who share same and equal level of interest.

A portal for brick layer to carpenter to plumbers to truck drivers to security, you name it and there are thousands of issues for which we need people to come together. Sadly, nobody is putting in the hard work.

We have to move in the right direction. A country as gifted as India with so much talent only requires the will and effort, and the results will surely become visible. India has to rise and shine before the world.

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